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**A CHANCE TO LIVE**



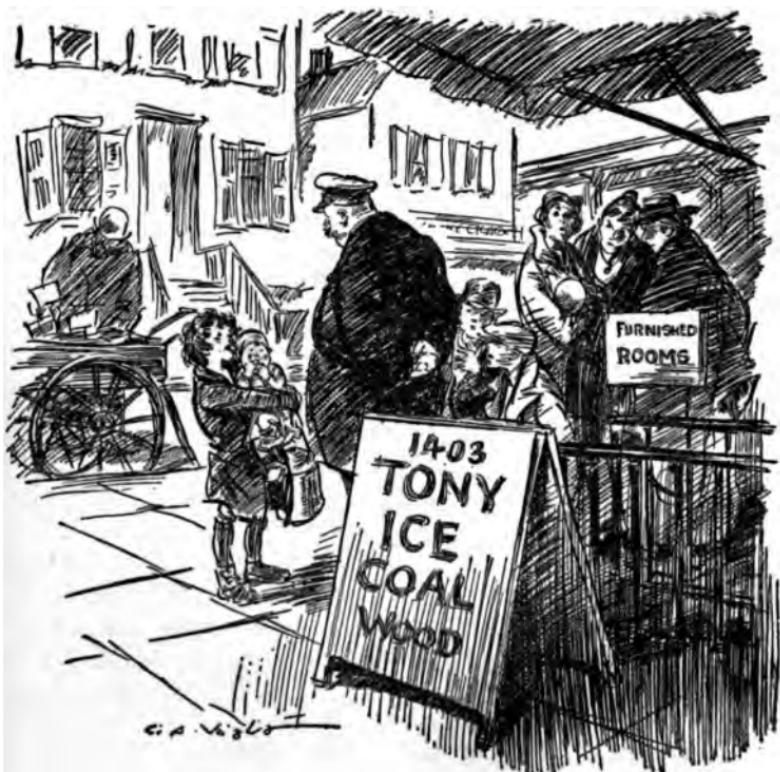
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"... A baby-cab's big enough to find, I guess. We'll get it back for you, never you worry."

# A CHANCE TO LIVE

BY

ZOE BECKLEY

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
KATHLEEN NORRIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
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**TO M. M. B.**



## FOREWORD

A GOOD many years ago I came to the conclusion that there was some woman, writing for an evening paper who had a most unusual gift. For a little while I called her the "woman whose name I never remember," and then I identified her as some unknown "Zoe Beckley," and after that I used to look, as thousands of other women do, for the name of Zoe Beckley, and read anything and everything she wrote.

It wasn't — as you all know — that there was anything especially arresting in this or that single article from her pen, but it was the sum of several of them, a dozen or a score, that made the impression. They ranged all over this kaleidoscopic city, from Rockefeller, into whose fastnesses she cheerfully penetrated, to the tiniest east side baby in a limp little rag of a wrapper, whose microscopic joys and sorrows she made her own, and from Roosevelt to the smallest of Boy Scouts. And everything she said was simple and human and true. Those are small adjectives, but I could name the writers to whom they apply on the fingers of one hand.

Her vignettes didn't always have the obvious, and the happy, ending. In the tiny stories she gave the world daily the working girls were real flesh-and-blood girls, who sometimes had colds in their heads, and sometimes forgot their ideals long enough to go to the movies, or to buy cheap silk stockings in December; and the employers were human, too — not all professional villains and deceivers. In a word, it was life. And it takes courage to write about life.

So that I used to feel that I liked and admired Zoe Beckley long before the fortuitous autumn day that first made us friends. There was no preliminary period of acquaint-

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anceship — we were friends at one bound. I forget what we were supposed to talk about; I think it was divorce. But by the time we had settled a few small matters, including divorce, and prohibition, and child labor, and birth control, and the social evil, and education, and matrimony, and socialism, and single tax, and the eight-hour law and suffrage, with a side-glance at Ireland and the war, we realized that we were having a great adventure in friendship. We were both Irish, of course, and both had been newspaper women, and poor, and we were near each other in years; and we were both Irish, of course —

I said that before. Anyway, we were both Irish, and there were very few things we didn't want to talk about, and didn't actually talk about, that first day. And it was then that I told her that she ought to write a novel — a novel about New York.

For I realized, as you all do, that there was hardly a phase of life in the Biggest City with which she was not entirely — and almost painfully — familiar. This small and earnest person, with the blue, blue eyes and the untouched rosy cheeks of a baby, has talked to half of the celebrities of the nation, the singers and actresses, the diplomats and the politicians, the altruists and theorists, the bees and the drones. And she has penetrated into New York's filthiest streets, where the ballooning bedding of Russia and Italy bulges upon American fire escapes; she knows the fetid air of the sweatshops, and the greasy smell of the east side restaurants; she knows what the girls in the department store basements do with their money, and what the mother of five fatherless babies thinks when the price of coal goes up. So that day, and on many days afterward, I urged her to write some of it all into a story. That was two years ago.

Well, she has written the story. She showed it to me a few nights ago, and I laughed and cried over it, as you will. It is only the story of one small, ambitious, wistful, life-hungry girl, Annie Hargan, lost in the lower regions of New York like a hundred thousand others, climbing and

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hoping in spite of the pitfalls and despairs that we leave in the path of such girls, studying life with half-puzzled and half-frightened eyes, holding tight to the miraculous truth of her own soul — as so many girls mysteriously do, in spite of all our civilization does to crust it and them.

And if it comes to you to wonder how many other girls' feet are going naturally and simply to follow Annie's feet, and how many other girls are going to find the solution where she finds it — well, Zoe and Annie and I can only assure you that the facts are these — and these — and these — and we are dealing, in this life, with facts.

For me, it is only to bespeak your interest and affection for little Annie Hargan, as she steps shyly but courageously into the world of loved heroines of fiction. And like Napoleon's irrepressible laundress at Fontainebleau, or like the curtain raiser who nodded a last reassurance to Galli-Curci when she made her first bow to us, I take the privilege of friendship to wish her Godspeed on her new way, I take her toil-worn and tired and strong little hands in mine and say, "Ladies and gentlemen — Annie!"

KATHLEEN NORRIS.



# A CHANCE TO LIVE

## CHAPTER I

### "THE BOTTOM OF THE UNIVERSE"

THIS was one of her big days. Twenty-five cents was to be spent at the butcher's alone. Annie hoped she would meet Edith Romer, who would not be able to sneer "Oooh — you're buyin' a ten-cent haslet! My mamma buys that for our cat!" No. On this particular morning Annie Hargan belonged to the moneyed class. Had not her mother put a whole dollar into the worn housekeeping purse as she reminded Annie to be sure and get a bone along with the stew meat, and be careful of the change?

In her best eight-year-old handwriting and with much wetting of the pencil Annie made out a list. Stew meat and salt pork at the butcher's. Tea, onions and a can of oil at the grocer's. Not that Annie couldn't remember the items quite well without putting them down. But it made her feel more important, more like the other housewives, to read the things off from a list.

Then she got the baby ready. Carefully she tied on its bonnet, stuffed its sausage-like arms into its coat sleeves, and put it in its carriage. There was a dab of grime on its cheek and symptoms of dampness about its nose. Annie corrected these flaws with the hem of her skirt.

She tucked the oil can beside the baby's feet, spread the baby's best afghan over all, and surveyed the effect admiringly. In fact, the baby, when finally ready for the outing, made so fine an appearance that Annie had misgivings as to her own sufficient elegance of toilette. With a whole dollar in one's purse and the baby's best afghan

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in commission, it being Saturday and all, the occasion seemed to demand extra embellishments in attire.

Annie climbed on a chair, stared into her mother's bedroom mirror, and regarded her reflection with disappointment. She saw a round little face with big, eager, round eyes. Annie thought her eyes would be nicer if they were sky-blue, like Bertha Simonds's doll's; or sparkling black, like the buttony orbs of Rosie Rothberg. Annie's were not definite enough. In some lights they looked brown; in others, gray. Often they were almost blue and much prettier than Bertha's doll's. But Annie didn't like them much.

Her hair was a source of wistfulness, too. It never looked smooth like Bertha's. Nor did it make a thick, long braid like Edith Romer's — that the boys in the street pulled naughtily sometimes. It was brown and always trying to work into little tendrils and waves that her mother encouraged into curls by brushing them over her finger when she had time. Which Annie hated. She wished her hair was bobbed off altogether, like some of the girls in school who lived in nice neighborhoods west of Third Avenue.

Some day, if she could ever save up the money, Annie plotted to go over to the man's on Second Avenue and have it cut off — Emma Davis had done that, and got whipped for it. Annie's mother never "whipped."

Annie's nose was nondescript, her mouth of generous size. One day her father had laughingly said she "took after him, with a mouth like a catfish." Later, when her mother found out why she was crying, she told her that if she behaved prettily people would always think she was pretty and that she might turn out good-looking, anyhow; you never could tell.

On this Saturday morning Annie brushed her hair as sleekly as possible, spit on her worn shoe-toes and wiped them with the stove-blacking rag. Then she "borrowed"

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oken brooch from her mother's cushion to replace the ty pin which fastened her jacket where the buttons : off, drew on her knitted cap and was ready.

er mother called after her that she shouldn't have n the baby's best afghan; that the old one was plenty l enough. But Mrs. Hargan was too busy to follow the matter. The old afghan, indeed! And Annie le to meet Mrs. Rothberg and Rose any minute as wheeled the baby toward Second Avenue. How little mother understood these things!

nnie did meet Edith Romer at the butcher's. Edith buying tripe. Annie ordered her stew meat with air of a society leader purchasing pearls at Tiffany's. v meat cost twice as much as tripe. For once Annie mistress of the situation!

he tucked the meat in the carriage alongside the oil can the baby's pudgy feet, spreading the afghan hand- ely. She wheeled her charge to the grocer's via the ery, where a windowful of wonders in colored icing e her mouth water. But this was not bakery day. One dn't expect everything.

front of the grocery, Annie disinterred the oil can, g it over her arm, then hauled out the baby and lugged into the shop to pat the kitty. Annie prolonged her of shopping to the utmost limit.

Got quite a load there!" said the grocer when at last ything was bought and wrapped up, and the baby had given a ginger snap.

Oh, it's all right; I've got the carriage," said Annie. Well, we like to accommodate carriage customers," ned the man. "I'll help you stow 'em." And he went l-humoredly to the door. "Now, then, where's your idge?"

nnie looked to the right and left, out by the curb, across street, everywhere. There was no carriage. The 's carriage was GONE.

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"You — you've hid it on me," she looked up into the grocer's face.

"No, I ain't, honest," he said.

"Then it's the boys," faltered Annie, accustomed like all the small girls of the neighborhood to the tormenting "jokes" of urchin gangs. With the weight of the baby swaying her spine back into a lopsided curve, Annie made her way to the corner. Her proud, little-mother smile had faded.

Of course, the boys would shove the carriage at her with frightening shouts, upsetting it and scattering its contents in the gutter. She was prepared, and braced herself to meet it.

But no noisy youngsters were there — only Tony, who kept the ice and coal cellar, grinning at her sociably. She asked Tony if he had seen the carriage. Tony had not.

Slowly and with sickening force the truth percolated. Annie's universe reeled and tumbled into chaos. It couldn't be true. It was unbelievable. Beyond words or tears. The carriage was stolen — The *baby's* carriage! Annie had not known there was such baseness in the world.

In a daze she returned to the grocer's. He had left her things by the door and gone back to attend his customers. Annie stood pressing the loppy baby to one shoulder and her other burdens to her heaving little chest as she tried to think things out.

How could she ever tell her mother? How bear the sight of her mother's face when she learned the baby's carriage — and the stew meat — and the pork for the beans — and the afghan — and everything — had been stolen —?

"Stand out of the doorway, little girl, you're in everybody's way," a woman was saying, giving Annie a bit of a shove. "Come, come, get along!"

Annie moved mechanically, hunched the baby into safe balance and started off slowly for home, the oil can bumping her small thigh, the baby dabbing wet crumbs of ginger snap down her neck.

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nly a great light shot into her brain. The police-  
he policeman, of course!  
men helped everybody. They knew everything;  
wered whatever you asked them! Policemen kept  
from stealing people's things. Policemen found  
t children. The policeman at the corner was her  
Hadn't he helped Annie and the baby over the  
dozens of times? He would surely help her now.  
t a policeman's business to keep the whole world in

got to the corner with her burdens. He was kind,  
eman. He bent down and listened attentively to  
.

1, now, that's too bad, sure it is," he said, patting  
shoulder and the baby's sticky hand. "A baby-  
; enough to find, I guess. We'll get it back for you,  
u worry."

's burden lightened magically. It was not so hope-  
r all. Even if the stew meat, the afghan, were lost,  
is the main tragedy did not fall upon her —

Hargan did not scold when Annie told her. Or  
r, as the mother of Edith Romer, who lived in the  
r tenement, would have done to Edith. She just  
eyes an instant, pressed her hand to her forehead  
:

— that's gone, has it? Well — just one more  
" and turned back to her ironing. There was de-  
the very silence that followed.

Annie told her, with great confidence, about the po-

he'll get it back, mother; he *said* he would! He  
would!" she repeated.

ple don't always do as they say," said Annie's  
in a dull tone, and went on with her work.

held tight, nevertheless, to her hope. Her belief  
pliceman was deep and sure. Every day she went to

him to ask about the carriage. There was no actual news of it, yet the big Irishman always spoke so kindly and encouragingly that Annie never once lost faith in him.

Then one day he was not there. A strange policeman was in his place.

"Where is the other policeman?" asked Annie with worried eagerness.

"Oh, him? Transferred to the Bronx," said the man laconically.

"But — what about the carriage?" the child faltered, beginning to be just a shade shaken in hope.

"Carriage? What carriage?"

Annie told him the tragedy. He laughed. He wasn't like the other policeman.

"Arrr-h, you'll never see that no more. It's firewood by now!"

So her friend had failed her! Her mother was right. They'd never get the carriage back again.

Annie was terribly troubled. Something was wrong with the world. It was not only the look on her mother's face whenever the carriage was mentioned. Nor the ache of Annie's back as she lugged the baby about everywhere. Nor the cruelty of a universe that contained baby-carriage stealers.

It was that the policeman had *promised*, and had not kept his word.

## CHAPTER II

### "ON KEEPING PROMISES"

LIFE was different to Annie after the baby's carriage was stolen. Now that she always had to carry the baby, it seemed a long way to the candy factory in Seventeenth Street where the neighborhood children went to sniff the heavenly odor of cooking chocolate.

Sometimes the girls who didn't have to lug babies would sneak off without her. Annie could then join one of the lesser social groups — say, the Italian little girls or the Jewish little girls — who were always hampered by many babies, and play unadventurous games on the doorstep. Or she could go over to the dock alone, where it was quiet, and think.

The tragedy of the baby carriage and the policeman's failure to keep his word about finding it made many things for Annie to think about.

There were the things, for instance, her optimistic father was always telling. Hadn't he told her again and again how they were going to be rich some day and go traveling around and seeing places? And have lovely clothes? And live in a flat with all light rooms?

If the policeman had failed her, mightn't these promises of her father's also go unfulfilled? Annie remembered how her mother always sighed whenever her daddy talked like that.

But no! No — it couldn't be. Her father never, never failed her when he promised anything. That Christmas once, when Annie had asked him for a tin kitchen with little pans that hung from hooks, like the one in the window on Third Avenue — hadn't her father promised she should have it, whatever it cost?

And, sure enough, on Christmas morning there it was waiting by the side of her bed, although her daddy suddenly began wearing his old broken shoes again instead of his new ones.

Annie had not heard her mother say to her father the night before: "Oh, Jim, why *will* you do these things?" And her father answer, "She has little enough; I want her to keep on smiling." No, decided Annie definitely, there couldn't be anything wrong with her father's prophecies. Whatever he said always "came true."

And then there was Aunt Moggie. Aunt Moggie often came Saturday afternoons and took Annie to look in the windows on Fourteenth Street. Sometimes they bought things. Annie was always terrified at the rattling chaos of the Union Square crossing. Before they stepped off the curb Annie would look up and say, "Aunt Moggie, will you *take care* of me?" And Aunt Moggie would always answer, "I'll take care of you; don't be afraid."

Then Annie would put her hand in her aunt's, shut her eyes tight and trot along, shivering deliciously at the sound of cars and wagons and clattering hoofs. But without a fear in the world. Aunt Moggie had *promised*. Still, since the policeman had not kept *his* promise, might Aunt Moggie fail her, too, some day?

It all troubled Annie very much. One evening after supper she climbed into her father's lap.

"I want to know about promises," she began. "Don't a person *have* to do what he says in a promise? You said so."

Her father nodded absently, reading his paper.

"But the policeman didn't get the baby's carriage back," pursued Annie.

"Course not; who thought he would?"

"But he promised," the child persisted.

"Oh, well, perhaps he couldn't. Or maybe it wasn't worth his while. If we were rich and it was a pearl necklace instead of a baby cab, I guess they'd have found it."



"I want to know about promises," she began.

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This puzzled Annie. What had being rich to do with it? Didn't the policeman always take just as good care of the children that lived in the tenements east of Third Avenue as he did of the ones from the flathouses further west — the girls who wore nice clothes and brought cake to school for lunch?

"But — but why did he *say* he'd get it back if he couldn't or if he didn't want to?" Annie was hot on the trail of Truth now.

"To jolly you along, I suppose." Annie's father wanted to get on with his editorial column. He didn't notice his child's big-eyed look of dismay — which included him.

"Then — then when you and mother and Aunt Moggie promise —" Annie was feeling her way along the perilous path of logic. Her father interrupted:

"That's different," he said. "Your mother and your Aunt Margaret and I love you and don't expect any return except that you be a good girl. Never mind the policeman, Nancie. Just you keep your own promises. Then at least you can expect other people to keep theirs — whenever they can. Run along now. Time to put your doll to bed."

But it was not as simple as all that to Annie. It was very puzzling indeed. You never could be sure, it seemed, how things would turn out, no matter what people promised.

She climbed down and "ran along" to put her doll to bed. And herself.

The doll's name was Lillian Russell, the same being the most beautiful name and personality thinkable to Annie Hargan, poor and "homely" and aged eight. She had named her straight from the luminously lovely fence posters over on First Avenue by the gas house.

As she took off Lillian's dress Annie noticed how shabby and soiled it was. Her own frock, as she glanced at it, was shabby and soiled, too. Worse than Lillian Russell's, if anything, for its back breadth didn't match its front. Blue-green and yellow-green collided painfully at the under-arm seams.

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This peculiarity of Annie's raiment was one of the torments of life. Annie's mother had a brother who was a salesman for a small drygoods house. When Uncle George returned from one of his trips he sometimes gave Annie's mother samples of cloth and gingham, and handfuls of fancy buttons that were left over and of no more use.

But Mrs. Hargan found ways to use pretty much everything. She had to. Years later, when Annie was grown and a mother herself, she used to look back and marvel at her own poor mother's thrift. But at the time this thrift was being practiced on small Annie it was a humiliation beyond words. Mrs. Hargan discovered that Uncle George's samples could be pieced together and made into school dresses for Annie.

Some of the samples were of such size that four were ample to cover Annie's small frame. But, of course, no two were ever of the exact same shade. Suppose the greens were being used, Annie's front breadths would be of "No. 23, bottle green," and "No. 24, hunter's green." Her back would be "No. 25, dark olive," and "No. 26, moss agate." Same way with the browns.

Moreover, the buttons, while looking alike at first glance, were all different in pattern or color when you examined them closely. Annie's mother always said: "It looks all right. Why, nobody'd ever notice it in the world!" She really thought so. She never dreamed of Annie's sufferings under the sample system. Perhaps she didn't know how keen children's eyes are, how quick to discover peculiarities — things that made you look "funny." She didn't know children's natural cruelty to one another, their enjoyment of expersonal woe.

Some of the sample dresses were worse than others. The green one was particularly bad. Annie's spirit turned to lead the days she had to wear it.

"Ooooh — look-at! Yer buttons are all kinds!" some child in her class at school would suddenly discover. "Ain't it funny! Why are they like that?"

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Annie's face would burn with mortification. She never knew what to answer. She dreaded the awful hour when she would have to go to the playground at recess. The classroom bench would no longer hide the motley of her raiment. There would be more looks, more giggles, more whispers behind hands.

How Annie longed to tear off the hated garment and stamp upon it. Instead, she stayed apart from the other children all she could and steeled herself not to cry before them.

Once she so rebelled against the dress that she played hookey and wandered almost to Union Square, feasting her eyes on the clothes displays in windows. Aunt Margaret, coming from one of the office buildings, stumbled across her and made her tell why she was not in school.

"Oh, Aunt Moggie," Annie sobbed, "I c-can't *stand* being dif-dif-dif'rent from all the other girls! I'm—g-going to—run away or—or somethin'."

And Aunt Moggie took her to a big store on Fourteenth Street and bought her a dress that Annie picked out herself. . . . Annie felt like another being.

She still had the adored dress, but was not allowed to wear it to school except on occasions. Still, it helped just to have it.

Also, Aunt Margaret had promised to buy her another one.

To-night as she undressed Annie recalled that promise. But the pleasure of it was poisoned by the doubts that tormented her since the baby carriage incident and the policeman's dereliction.

Sleepily as she put herself to bed beside "Lillian Russell," she pondered many things. Her father's words, "When your mother and your Aunt Margaret and I promise you things, it's different—" gave her renewed faith. Then came the haunting, "It wasn't worth his while; if we were rich—" Why *weren't* we rich? What made some people

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rich and some — Annie almost dozed off. Was the policeman rich? Was Aunt Moggie rich? She *must* be. How did she get rich? . . . Would she show Annie how to get rich? . . . and buy clothes . . . and have beautiful things . . .

Annie trailed off into dreamland, hugging her threadbare doll.

## CHAPTER III

### ENTER A TYPEWRITER

IT was always a wonderful adventure for Annie to go home with Aunt Moggie and spend the night. It usually happened on Saturdays, because Aunt Moggie didn't have to "go to the office" next day. There were always interesting things to play with in Aunt Moggie's room, and a never-failing bag of gum-drops or chocolate creams tucked in a drawer of the desk.

This desk of Aunt Moggie's was in itself a mine of treasure. It was no spindly weakling of a desk like the one in the "parlor" at Edith Romer's house, with a turn-up flap in front that you pulled down when you wanted to write. And the whole thing wiggled when you touched it, and there was an inkwell made of a stag's foot with the fur on, that never had any ink in it. And a penwiper with a hand-painted celluloid top layer that said on it: "May all your joys be underlined and all your sorrows blotted out. Niagara Falls."

No. Aunt Moggie's desk was square and flat. There was a tier of drawers down one side that mysteriously locked themselves when you closed something at the top. In the drawers were stacks of clean, white paper and envelopes. And some sheets of very thin, black paper, with one side glossy, and when you put it between the white sheets it made a miraculous copy of whatever you wrote on the white.

But the crowning joy of all was what sat on top of the desk and went down inside it out of sight when the desk shut. A typewriter! When Aunt Moggie had first got it, two years before, she let no one touch it but herself. She had bought it "at too much sacrifice to have anything happen to it"—whatever that meant.

Annie sat by the hour watching her work at it with flying fingers, while the thing clicked and clattered and printed off pages and pages of neat straight lines.

Even when Aunt Moggie was not writing on the wonderful machine Annie liked to look at her. Annie thought Aunt Margaret Bailly must be years and years younger than her sister, who was Annie's mother. She was so slim and neat-looking. Her hair was never in loose locks. Her shirtwaists were never mussed or damp under the arms and across the back. She never had to wash and iron clothes and cook. Her boots never lacked buttons. She had nice gloves — and a muff besides. Annie's mother had only one pair of gloves, and they were worn and baggy and out at the tips. Aunt Moggie never sighed and said she was "so tired she could just die," as Annie's mother often did.

As a matter of fact, Annie's Aunt Margaret Bailly was well past thirty, only a few years younger than Mrs. Hargan. But there were plenty of reasons for her looking younger.

"Aunt Moggie," began Annie, into whose mind a gradual connection was being made between the singleness and prosperousness of her aunt, and the marriedness and wornness and poverty of her mother, "Aunt Moggie, why are you rich and why isn't mother?"

"I'm not rich, darlin' — far from it," said Aunt Moggie. "I work mighty hard for what I get."

"But you get money for it. Mother works all the time. Why doesn't she get money for it?"

Aunt Moggie didn't answer for a minute. She was looking far off, somewhere. She had big blue eyes that were usually grave, a beautiful straight nose that Annie envied with all her soul, and a sweet mouth that smiled but rarely laughed.

"Being married and having a home and a family," she answered slowly, more to herself, it seemed, than to Annie, "is one of the fine things. Maybe it's the best thing.

But it doesn't always *seem* to pay you back for what you put into it." Then, bringing her eyes down to small Annie — "Your mother gets paid in other ways than money, dearie. You and your father love her. And when the baby's big enough, she'll love her too. That's her pay."

Annie thought. She looked at Aunt Moggie and at her clothes. She looked round the room. Everything in it was ideally luxurious to Annie. From the narrow bed with the "sham" worked with a curlicued "B" in red cotton and the clean, white spread, to the marble-topped bureau with the long glass, and the "stationary washstand" in the corner, where you could get both hot and cold water by just turning a tap — all the furnishings were exactly what Annie longed for and resolved to have when she grew up. At her house, if you wanted hot water, you had to heat it on the stove. And if you wanted to look at the bottom of your skirt you had to climb on a chair and peer into a cracked glass in a dresser.

"I think," said Annie soberly, finishing her appraisal of the room, "I'd rather be you and live in a place like this. Don't you *have* to be rich, Aunt Moggie, to live in a place like this?" Annie was remembering also the dresses Aunt Moggie had bought her, and the things at Christmas, and the bags of candy in the desk drawer. Annie's sense of money values was vague. A dollar was the most money she had ever seen in her life at one time.

"I get paid twelve dollars where I work," said her aunt, "but my friend here —" she laid her hand on the keyboard of the typewriter — those shiny white discs with letters and figures that fascinated Annie so — "my friend here often helps me to make sixteen."

Annie's eyes became saucers of wonderment. Sixteen dollars a week! The sum was too huge, of course, to be grasped fully, but it represented definite wealth. From that moment on Aunt Moggie stood in Annie's mind for Greatness and Success.



**It was always a wonderful adventure for Annie to go home  
with Aunt Moggie.**

Annie got up and timidly touched the glossy sides of the machine that made this vast prosperity possible. Thoughts were rushing pellmell through her awakening mind. How had Aunt Moggie learned to do this wonderful thing? Did lots of ladies do it? Why hadn't her mother done it, instead of having "the home and husband and children?" Why did *anybody* want homes where they had to work all the time, and husbands and children, when they could have a typewriter and a lovely, neat room and pretty clothes and hot water right in the corner, so that you could wash your hands without their getting all red and chapped?

Still — all the women in the neighborhood where Annie lived were like her mother. They, too, had homes and husbands and children, and worked and cooked and sometimes cried, and were always saying there was no money — no money — no money — that was the incessant wail! They hadn't money for meat or clothes, or doctor's bills or for rent.

And if so many women had homes and husbands and children and trouble, instead of the things Aunt Moggie had, how did it happen that Aunt Moggie was different? Why wasn't she married like the others and —

Annie's flying thoughts were halted by Aunt Moggie's voice.

"If you'd like to play with it a little, and will be careful not to break anything," she was saying, "I'll put the dictionary under you on this chair and you can write a letter on the typewriter to your mother. There!" And Annie was plumped upon the chair, her small fingers fluttering helplessly over the puzzling white keys.

She pressed one down gingerly. It didn't strike the paper. She tried again, harder. Behold! It "printed." There was a capital A on the white paper, just as good as Aunt Moggie could have made it. It took an awful while to find the right letters. Aunt Moggie had to help her out.

But after much trying and failing and laughing and

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making mistakes and rubbing them out and starting fresh and keeping at it, there stood the letters of her whole name: *ANNIE HARGAN*. She had printed them herself! It was better than playing jackstraws. More fun than touching the yellow old piano keys at Edith Romer's house!

Thereafter Annie had a new pleasure in life. And a new story to tell the girls of the neighborhood about her wonderful Aunt Moggie. Annie had bragged of Aunt Moggie before — how she wasn't afraid of thunder-and-lightning storms and had taught Annie not to be; how she didn't mind going right into a dark room and had laughed away Annie's cowardice in this respect; how she had told Annie never to be afraid of ghosts and "spirits," that there weren't any, anyhow, and if there were they wouldn't hurt her; how Aunt Moggie had taken her to the beach and they had gone in bathing and not been scared at the big cold waves — and, oh, lots of things.

Now Aunt Moggie had taught her something else. None of the other girls knew how to work a typewriter. Annie's accomplishment was unique.

After this Annie begged incessantly to be let "go to Aunt Moggie's." But sometimes, even when Aunt Moggie came for her, Annie had to mind the baby instead. The weather was getting hot and the baby needed air at the docks.

"I don't see what good it does to have her fooling all the time with that typewriter of yours," Annie's mother said once. And Aunt Moggie had answered:

"It won't do her a bit of harm to learn a little something outside the house and the babies and the cooking."

## CHAPTER IV

### A PICTURE GOES

**A**LITTLE before Annie's ninth birthday her father was taken ill. Inflammatory rheumatism, they called it. He had to stop work, and there was a dreadful time. For a long while Annie didn't go to Aunt Moggie's, or see the typewriter, or hardly think of it. When she came home from school there were millions of things to do. The baby was getting big now and seemed to need more of everything — more food, more dressing and undressing, more watching and taking care of. There were many errands to run and a great deal of work to help her mother with.

Annie was frantic over her father's sickness. He didn't complain. Whenever Annie asked how he felt, he always laughed and said he'd soon be "sitting up and taking notice." But when he did finally get up he was so thin and gaunt that it terrified Annie just to look at him.

And he went about on crutches which frightened her still more. Crutches belonged with hospitals and ambulances and dreadful things that Annie shuddered at. It seemed as if she just couldn't *stand* seeing her own father so broken, so beaten, so helpless and so racked with pain.

One day when it was sunny and springishly warm, Annie lugged the baby over to Stuyvesant square. The baby scraped an infantile acquaintance with another baby and was googling over a pile of grass and pebbles that meant something to them.

Annie sat on a bench trying to keep her mind on her spelling-book lesson for next day. She was tired — there had been so much to do lately after school. Her eyes roved over the grass beds and beyond the trees to the rows of dignified old houses that flanked the square. Sometimes

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carriages passed, or stopped before the handsome doorways, and beautifully dressed ladies and children would get in or out. This was one of the spots in the great city where the poor from "over east" merged a little with the rich. It was one of Annie Hargan's favorite "dreaming places."

Presently a tall, thin man on crutches came painfully along the sidewalk just outside the park. He was poorly dressed and stopped every now and then to rest, wiping his forehead, although the day was not hot.

The man reminded Annie vaguely of her father. She looked closer. It *was* her father, she saw with sudden shock, for she could not get used to seeing him idle and broken and so gaunt.

He paused and stood braced with his crutches and leaning against the railing of the square. Annie was about to run to him, when a gentleman with expensive clothes and a cane and silk hat stopped, looked at her father for an instant, then reached into his pocket and handed him something.

Annie watched, big-eyed, saw her father call after the gentleman, saw him hand back whatever it was he had given him. They exchanged a word or two, then the gentleman passed on, and Annie's father wiped his forehead again and slowly resumed his trudge.

Small as she was, Annie felt a stab of wild resentment, of rebellion, of pity, of bewilderment. That some one should have taken her daddy for a — a beggar! O — h — ! Hot tears gushed to her eyes. She picked the baby up, buried her face in its pudgy back and sobbed, unnoticed. Only the baby cared. And she only because her fascinating game of pebbles and grass was disrupted.

Annie hated, hated, *hated* the rich man who had offered her daddy money. And yet how happy Annie herself always was when the woman in the house next the church gave her a nickel for running an errand! Why was it different? Why — Oh, there was no answer to it — to anything —

## A CHANCE TO LIVE

She wiped her eyes and nose on the baby's petticoat and started home. Now the baby was whimpering. Annie wanted to shake her. She wanted to do something to somebody to ease the ache inside her. Her world was all wrong. What could she do to make it right?

That night Annie watched her father with a new sympathy. She contrasted him with the fathers of some of the girls she knew. Their fathers were often sick and complaining and out of work and cross and stingy and sometimes cruel. Annie's father, never. He had always been well, always cheerful, always sure good fortune was about to come his way, though it never did. He was always good to her and to the baby, and forever buying them little presents.

How often Annie had seen the distracted look on her mother's face when her father brought home a toy or a pressed-glass pitcher or a cheap framed picture for the house. Annie thought them beautiful. But her mother always turned away sighing. Once she said to Aunt Moggie:

"There he goes again buying useless trumpery — and me without money to get shoes for the children or food for him! Oh, why can't he have a little practicality!"

Annie didn't know what "practicality" meant. But she felt sorry for her father and hoped he hadn't overheard. It was not until years afterward when she looked back — and felt sorry for her mother, too. At the time she just wondered and wondered why a person who was so good and so smart (her father could answer all sorts of questions, and he knew how to say "How do you do" in French and German!) should have so little money and so little "practicality," whatever it was. Bertha Simonds's father was an ugly boor of a man. And he made a lot of money. He worked in the saloon at the corner. The Simondses could always pay their rent, and Bertha had a foulard silk

immed with buttons with ships on them all alike, spoke bonnet with field flowers. Why did some ve things and other folks not? What made them now to get them? Annie would have enjoyed the as much as Bertha did. Maybe more; she'd have been more careful of it.

ld by Jim Hargan was better and got a place again. ot as good a place as the other, but it was — a place.

lay Annie found her mother crying. She was sew- something made of calico — a black ground with ches of pink, red and yellow flowers on it.  
at's the matter, mother?" Annie was stabbed with

hing," said Mrs. Hargan, wiping her eyes on the arment.

here must be! "Did — did you cut it out wrong?" nnie's mother had cried over some silk she had from the necktie factory to work on at home. It something had been cut wrong and had to be "paid

It's all right. Run along, Annie, and take the t."

: a dress for the baby?" Annie fingered the black The baby always got the best of things. Annie's were hodgepodged out of odds and ends — except unt Moggie bought her.

haps —" said Annie's mother, and went on with ing.

: didn't "run along" immediately, however, she king.

her!"

?"

her, I'm nine. When I'm ten I can get a place at store, on Third Avenue. Edith Romer's there.

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She told the man she was twelve, going on thirteen. She gets two dollars a week; that's a great deal, isn't it? I'm going to do it, too, so's you and father won't have to work so hard. And when I'm bigger I'm going to be a type-writer-writer like Aunt Moggie. I'd rather be that than—" Annie stopped herself. She was on the verge of saying that she'd rather live alone like Aunt Moggie and have a nice room all to herself, and neat clothes, and a watch and chain, than to be like mother, always working and cooking and having trouble about money. But that would surely be wrong to say. She caught herself in time and finished lamely, "than — than anything."

" You must keep right on going to school," answered her mother. " You'll never be like your Aunt Moggie unless you do. Your father's got work now — if he can only keep it. Just you go straight on with your school and stop thinking about Kately's store."

A short time after that there was a great stir about the place. Annie was taken over to her Aunt Moggie's boarding house, and when she was brought home again there was a new baby!

Annie was frantic to take it in her arms. The woman from across the hall shooed her away and busied herself over Mrs. Hargan.

" You look after your little sister," the neighbor said, " and if you're a good girl you can come back in a couple of hours and I'll let you hold him a minute."

The couple of hours seemed an eternity to Annie. A baby brother! It seemed too wonderful to be true. The neighborhood boys could no longer taunt her with " Oooh — it's only a goil! Goils ain't nothin'—" She could be as proud as any of them now! Annie felt her whole social status elevated.

When she came back to " hold him " the neighbor woman put her in a small chair by the stove, and after what seemed

ndless waiting brought a bundle, limp and warm and it slowly in Annie's lap.

Careful, now — don't drop him!"

Annie was indignant to the core. Drop him, indeed! If she didn't know as much about taking care of a baby at woman did! Had she ever dropped her baby sister? She ever —

er resentful defense was halted by her mother's weak : from the bed: "He does look queer in that black-ered slip. I wish I could have had all white things for

But the black was a remnant — cheap. And it won't 'the dirt —"

pang shot through Annie's heart as she looked down ie baby's slip. It was "queer" looking — that black. e of the neighborhood babies had black-flowered es. The children would laugh, of course, when Annie the baby out later on. Of course, there would have to something to spoil the joy of her pride in him! She self had always suffered with "funny-looking" clothes. the baby shared her trouble. Only the baby was too to know. The mortification always fell upon Annie. ld she never be free of this poverty-bred necessity of ; "different"?

ne day, coming in from school, Annie heard the voices er mother and the landlady, Mrs. Shannon, who lived he first floor and acted as housekeeper, rent collector general adviser after a fashion to all the neighbor-

But if I haven't got the rent money I can't give it to " she heard her mother say. "We've had so much less and all."

here was a short silence, while Annie listened, "That's e picture ye've got on the wall there," from Mrs. Shan- "Oil paintin', ain't it?"

Yes — it's one we've had a long, long time. Some one

in my husband's family back in Ireland painted it," from her mother.

There was another silence, then more talk so low that Annie couldn't hear. But presently Mrs. Shannon came out of the door with the picture under her arm, brushing by Annie so quickly that she nearly knocked her over.

Annie rushed in to her mother, aghast and inarticulate with rage.

"Mis' Shannon's a — a — a — *fiend!*" she gasped, that being the most opprobrious term she could think of at the moment. "I hate her — I —"

Her mother hushed her sharply.

"She's very kind," said Mrs. Hargan. "We're mighty lucky she was willing to take the picture. You don't understand."

But Annie was beginning to understand much.

The baby's pathetic little black calico slips, her own horrid clothes made of Uncle George's "samples," the lack of money for rent, the eternal work that brought so little — there must be reasons why all this happened to *her* family and not to the girls who lived over west of Third Avenue and were in her class at school. There must be some fault. Was it her father's? Her mother's? Whose? Would it ever be different? Annie didn't know. Oh, if she only *could* know!

## CHAPTER V

### HALCYON YEARS

NNIE decided to ask her father about these things that puzzled her. He was her friend and oracle. He v how lightning happened. And the Aurora Borealis. what made summer and winter. And why some people white skins and some black. Everything. He never d her.

"Why did Mrs. Shannon take the picture away, daddy?" ie plunged straight to her point.

"Because we didn't have the rent quite ready for her month," her father answered.

"Why didn't we have it? You work, father. Don't earn a lot of money every week?"

"It takes a great deal of money, Annie, to pay doctor's and other things. Sometimes we get a little behind."

"Will we be able to pay it next month?"

"Sure we will, Nancie. It's getting better all the time  
."

"Will you have more money, by and by?"

"I hope to — Yes, kiddie, there ought to be more in a t while now."

"But don't you *know*, Farth?"

"Yes, I know, because I hope and believe. Listen, ce. If you have hope about a thing, you believe. You ve it more and more, and that makes you go on trying. harder you try, the more you do. You can do anyg, Nannie, if you want it enough, and keep at it, and t lose hope. Sometimes things are bound to go wrong a while. You wouldn't want to have only cake and jam at, would you? You'd soon get sick of it. If you have

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plain bread for a while, or no bread at all, you enjoy the sweets all the more when you have them. That's how it is with everything. Things come right again, if you go on believing and trying. Then you appreciate them more. Do you understand me, Nance?"

Annie never forgot that talk with her father. It cheered her greatly. Life seemed brighter, her chores easier, the future more beckoning.

The best of it was that some of what her father told her began to come true. One night he came home with great news. Annie heard her mother cry out delightedly, "—And you're going to be made bookkeeper — eighteen a week? Oh, Jim, I'm glad!"

Annie was wild with excitement when she learned they were to move. They were going over *west* of Third Avenue!

"We're going to have four rooms, every one light, and a *bath!*" she told Bertha Simonds, hardly able to contain herself. "And there's a vestibule with bells and speaking tubes, and your name on top! And when somebody rings, you can open the front door from upstairs! And there's a yard out back and my father is going to fix me a swing in it. . . . You can come over." Here indeed, Annie's cup of joy overflowed. To be able to offer Bertha Simonds something — Bertha whose father worked in the saloon and made loads of money. But they had no yard for all that!

Other wonders came to pass. There was a new go-cart for the baby. This not only raised Annie instantly into a higher social plane, according to the standards of the neighborhood youngsters, but it made excursions possible to the park and to other girls' houses and for long walks, "window-shopping." For you can't do anything except stick around the front stoop if you have a small sister to watch and a baby brother always hanging limply over your shoulder or being held in your lap.



her father, she saw with sudden shock. . . .

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Annie's clothes got better. Her mother often gave her Uncle George's samples to make doll clothes of, instead of having her own garments made of them. Being relieved of this bugbear of hideous raiment for school wear, Annie's cramping shyness wore off. School grew easier to bear. She mingled more with other children. Lessons were not such a burden since she could "do" them with "her crowd."

Visits to Aunt Moggie and the wonderful typewriter became more frequent. And it marked a distinct new epoch in Annie's life the day her mother handed her two nickels tied in the corner of a handkerchief and said:

"I think you're big enough now to go to Aunt Margaret's alone. Be careful when you get on the car, and be sure and tell the man to let you off at Twenty-second Street. Are you sure you know which way to go when you get off the car?"

Annie was "sure." She felt grown up at last, freed of childish hamperings, confident of future well-being.

The three or four years that followed were the halcyon ones. Annie never heard of any trouble about the rent. There was nearly always enough to eat. Once she even had a "party" with cake and lemonade. It was no longer a golden festival when she was able to buy chopped meat at the butcher's or a whole quarter's worth of eggs at Schultz's grocery store. She enjoyed it, but the novelty of rare opulence was gone.

She now had often a penny to spend — sometimes two. And for a time her father gave her a whole nickel each week for keeping her fingernails clean. She made new acquaintances — girls who were ever so much more interesting than Bertha Simonds and Edith Romer. Girls who owned tricycles and roller skates and had blackboards at home to play school with.

She went to school mornings with Louise Brand and Emma Jervis, both of whom lived in actual brownstone fronts around the corner, and were among the elite of

ie's class in school. Louise wore a coat that was lined through with fur. And Emma's mother, a widow, had sole house, the rooms of which she rented to "strang-

She nor Emma never on any account permitted them called boarders. Annie admired this touch of elegance mely.

nma was going to study music. This definite ambition mma's part spread a contagion of resolution among the rs. Louise wanted to be an actress. Ethel Putnam, lived with two gaunt maiden aunts and a giant maltese cross the street from Annie's flathouse, had social ass ions. She was going to marry a millionaire and have es and carriages and servants and clothes and grand otiions and a box at the opera.

nnie still held to Aunt Moggie as her ideal of inde nce and prosperity. But when she told the girls she going to be a stenographer and typewriter they curled iful lips. That was no way to get rich and rise in social world. Even Rose Rothberg, Annie's old friend ie east side tenement, who had moved slightly westward the Hargans and was still a neighbor, was unfavorably osed toward the typewriting idea.

I'm going to keep a store," said Rose. "A delicatessen candy store," she added with twofold magnificence. , father, he says, if you want to make a good living you ld trade in something everybody has gotta have. Peo have gotta eat," she went on with creditable logic. ave us keep a store together, Annie, you and me, yes? better."

he ideas were all good, Annie admitted. But her Aunt gie was a living, breathing example of Success, ac ing to Annie's standards. She loved her Aunt Moggie hat whatever she did was touched with idealism. If t Moggie had chanced to be a milliner instead of a etary in a big publishing house, millinery would have . Annie's goal. Besides, Annie hugged to herself the

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knowledge that she was further along in her ambitions than the other girls. She already knew a part of her trade-to-be. She had never ceased to be interested in the typewriting machine on her aunt's businesslike desk. Her small fingers could now actually find their swift way over the magic keyboard. And it had all come in the course of play, when she was so little that she had to sit on the dictionary and a pillow to reach up.

## CHAPTER VI

### "LAND OF THE FREE"

WHEN Annie was eight her compositions on Aunt Mogie's typewriter usually took the form of a letter to mother. Nowadays it was different. Her thirteen-year-old ideals were, like her fingers, bigger, more ambitious. She now preferred to write maxims from her copybook and verses from songs she sang in school. She admired all the handsome Spencerian legends such as "Honesty is the best policy" and "Procrastination is the thief of time." But there were others she liked better.

"Perseverance conquers all things" was one. Annie traced this with infinite pains, rounding every letter perfectly, shading the down strokes, making the "q" and the "g" neatly plump and symmetrical, and finishing with a decisive period.

At the tope of page 7 stood forth in perfect copperplate the words, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.—Shakespeare." Here indeed was an inspiration. It bore out her daddy's very words, "You can do anything, Nancie, if you want it enough, and keep at it, and don't lose hope."

There was another one, too: "As a man thinketh, so is he." The same promise again — you can do anything, have anything, by hanging onto the idea and working toward it! Her father, her aunt, her copybook and this man Shakespeare, all agreed. It must be true, then. It was very comforting.

Then there were the songs. "Oh, say, does the Star-Spangled Banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" Annie loved that adjective, "star-

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spangled." It made her think of vast spaces that glittered with golden opportunities; of coolness and cleanness and peace; of beautiful fairies and angels — didn't they always have a gilded star at the end of a wand?

"— land of the free," what a glorious feeling that gave you! It puzzled Annie a little, though. Free from what? She asked her father, and he said it meant free from oppression; that everybody had a chance to have and to be whatever they wanted; that there was no ruler who had power over people's lives and property, like in some countries; and that even the poor were allowed to say who should be President and who should help make the laws and what not.

"— and the home of the brave." Annie knew about that without having to ask. It meant people like her father, who went to work even when he was so sick with the rheumatism he could hardly get along. And like Aunt Moggie, who wasn't afraid of thunder and lightning or of the waves at the seashore when they "went in bathing." And like the policeman who stopped runaways and chased burglars. And the firemen around the corner who dashed out any time, day or night, in that flying, clanging, thrilling engine, and went straight into burning houses and saved people! What a wonderful thing to live in a country where every one was brave.

"Land of the free and the home of the brave." Annie adored the line. She wrote it on the typewriter oftener than any other.

"Columbia, the gem of the ocean, the home of the brave and the free—" There it was again! "The shrine of each patriot's devotion; the world offers homage to thee!" This song was almost as thrilling as the other. Annie got little shivers down her back every time she shrilled it out with the rest of the class in school, where the big crossed flags were draped above the platform in the assembly room.

Annie always glanced over to where Rosie Rothberg sat, and Frieda Schnabel and other little girls who had been

born in foreign countries. Annie had a distinct feeling of patronage. This country was hers at first hand. It belonged to her just naturally. Those other girls had to come over to it and ask to be let in. She felt it gave her immense prestige and advantage.

"—the world offers homage to thee!" When Annie asked the teacher what homage meant, she said, "Go look in the dictionary." It meant, Annie found, "respect exhibited by outward action," "reverential regard or worship," "deference, obeisance." She wondered if Rosie and Frieda and the rest realized all that, and were appreciative enough. She asked Rosie about it.

"Sure, it's a fine country," Rosie said. "My fader he wasn't allowed to keep a store in Russia where we lived. He's got two of them here — one on First Avenue and one on Second. I'm gonna have one on Third Avenue, like I told you, when I'm finished school. Sure, it's a fine country."

And so Annie built up the structure of her ideals. She was going on fourteen and about to be graduated from elementary school. There was to be a white dress with a sash and hair ribbon, and new shoes. Her father had promised her a gold ring with the date on it, engraved between garlands, like one they had admired in a jeweler's window, if her final examination papers averaged among the highest ten girls in the class. Optimistic Jim Hargan even talked of sending Annie to high. Why not? She could be a teacher, perhaps.

"But I want to be a stenographer and typewriter like Aunt Moggie, and have an office and go out to lunch at a restaurant, and come home in a crowd every night," submitted Annie, unswerved from her early dream.

"Why not be a teacher of stenographers and typewriters?" suggested Aunt Moggie. Aunt Margaret Bailly had bigger ambitions for Annie than \$16 a week. "Go to high school first, then to business college. You can't be too



Annie's father did not come home one night from work. A man came instead, hat held nervously in hand. . . .

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well grounded," she added wistfully, "if you want to make a big salary these days. You must begin right. There weren't many business women when I started. They're getting thick as hops now."

Annie's mother inclined toward the teaching idea, too. Annie was not averse to it, if it meant having a nice room and nice clothes and money to do things with — things for her mother and little sister and the baby, in case her father's dreams of fortune *shouldn't* come true. So Annie worked up for the exams, and was pretty happy about everything.

Then, out of a clear sky, a bolt descended.

Annie's father did not come home one night from work. A man came instead, hat held nervously in hand, and told Mrs. Hargan there had been an accident at the warehouse where Jim Hargan was employed. A fire. Annie's father was determined to save the ledgers and journals at which he worked at the high desk in the office. The rheumatism he had suffered from a few years before had affected the heart, it seemed. The man finished his hard task in as few words as possible.

Annie's mother went right down on the floor, first on her knees, then sort of crumpled together in a heap.

In a frenzy of terror and foreboding Annie asked questions of everybody at once. No one answered. Neighbors came in. Aunt Margaret was sent for. Everything was strange and terrible. Annie and her small sister and the baby, who was not really a baby any longer but a fat, lusty boy of four, spent the night with the family next door.

Annie never quite knew what happened during the next hours and days. It was all a blurr, a nightmare.

It was Aunt Moggie who tried the hardest to comfort Annie, holding her close and kissing her many times. But despite her pleas and cautionings, Annie's grief was wild. It shook her through and through. It bruised and tore her. That her father could die — *die* and leave her! Her father, whom she could always count on, who always

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kept his promises and never, never failed her, no matter what!

It seemed as if the whole world must pause and heed what had happened. Annie actually stopped crying to listen if the wagons were still rattling in the street, the elevated still thundering on Third Avenue, hucksters shouting their wares, neighbors still calling across air-shafts, hand organs still playing —

Yes, sounds of activity were proceeding as usual. It didn't seem possible, but it was.

For a long time afterward Annie felt like a cripple. If she had lost an arm or a leg she couldn't have felt more helpless and hopeless. She even shrank from her friends in school and in the street — children whose fathers were alive, children who were happy.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MAW OPENS

**B**UT she's hardly fourteen. I can't bear to think of her going to work — after her father's ambitions for her and all. If only I could get strong again! Oh, Margaret, don't you s'pose *any* of the necktie factories that give out home work will pay more than seven cents a dozen for hand-finishing?"

"Suppose they did? Suppose you got ten or twelve, you couldn't do more than six or seven dozens a day, with the three children and the house to see after — not if you worked your fingers to the bone! No — there's no other way! Annie'll have to help out. I hate it as bad as you do, Jennie, but we've got to be practical. Annie's bright. She'll get along. If she earns two and a half and you four or five, you'll make out, with what I'm able to do."

Mrs. Hargan and her sister did not know the subject of their discussion was within hearing, listening eagerly, ear to door, heart pit-a-patting. So she, Annie, was going to work, after all! Just as she had urged her mother to let her do that time when Edith Romer got her job at Kately's store.

Annie was not distressed. On the contrary, it was exhilarating, this thought of "going to business." It gave her a sense of importance. It almost made up for the lack of graduation and the white frock and sash, the new shoes. And the ring her father had promised —

Annie thought of her father with a catch of the breath. This having to work drew her in some mystic way nearer her father — sort of bridged the chasm. Perhaps he knew about it, as Aunt Moggie believed. And would be proud.



Annie was taken on at Rourke's department store. . . . She was to get \$2.08 a week.

A few days later Annie was taken on at Rourke's department store in Fourteenth Street as cash girl. She was to get \$2.08 per week. The eight cents was paid her for washing the blue apron it was the rule of the shop in those days for errand girls to wear.

The wages were paid twice a month, and when you said it that way — \$4.16 — it sounded quite big. Annie's work was to run to the saleswoman when she called out "Cash!" take the purchased goods and the book, in which was placed the record of sale and the customer's money, have the parcel wrapped, get the change and bring it expeditiously back to the counter.

Her hours were from eight to six. On Saturday nights till nine. For a month before Christmas the store kept open till ten o'clock. There was no extra pay.

There were no child-labor laws then. Or certainly none that counted. Little, short-skirted girls who looked no more than ten, but said they were fourteen, were fed into the maw of industry as represented in Rourke's and in hundreds of worse, harder places. One of the thin-legged youngsters, who got a job the same day Annie did, said Rourke's was "as easy as pie." She had been working in a book bindery till a fire had gutted the place, with loss of life and a wiping out of business.

"I had to stand on a box," the child told Annie, "because I couldn't reach up to the machine. And whenever the inspector came around, the men shoved me quick in behind the piles of stock and said, 'No one here under age.' And when he'd gone, I came out. I was always scared. I thought maybe they'd put me in prison if they caught me. But I made \$4 a week sometimes."

The child's words, "I thought they'd put me in prison if they caught me," flashed a sudden remembrance into Annie's mind of her one-time friend the policeman who promised to find the baby's stolen carriage — and didn't. And of the other policeman who laughed when Annie

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begged *him* to help her, actually *laughed* and said, "Huh! The carriage is firewood by now!"

Before that episode, Annie had always thought of policemen as saviors and helpers of people — benign beings whose mission was to keep bad things from happening and make good things come true. After the episode she lost faith in their beneficence.

But here was a girl who might actually have been *put in prison* by one of them, if he'd found her working in that factory! None of her fault, either. She had to work. The factory people *let* her work. And yet she was afraid — and had to hide —

What was this thing called law, anyhow, that was behind policemen and inspectors and factory keepers and jails? And why were *poor* people always afraid of it? Oh, if her father were only alive and could explain! *He* used to say the law was made to *protect* people. It was all a muddle. . . .

The Hargans moved into smaller quarters. Annie walked nine blocks to work every morning. This was not so hard. It was the coming home at night that was the terrific ordeal.

The incessant traveling about the store basement, from counter to cash desk and back again, always hurrying, always pushing through crowds, wearied Annie beyond anything she had ever dreamed of. She used to think carrying the heavy baby was hard. It was nothing compared to this for making your feet hurt and your back ache.

The air grew horribly stale and hot by noontime. When lunch hour came, Annie felt weak and empty, but not at all like eating. She hadn't much at that — only a roll sandwich sometimes, with bologna sausage or cold boiled meat in it, and an apple.

Annie's one delight was the silk remnant counter. Bright lengths of fabric were piled here in a glory of richness. Annie feasted her eyes on them, playing a game with herself



**For the remainder of the day Annie moved about like a person  
in a trance.**

of "Which would you choose if you could have any one you want?" She made herself in imagination gorgeous frocks.

She dressed her whole family. This maroon silk for Aunt Moggie. The mauve with white figures for mother. The pink-and-green stripe for six-year-old sister. The blue velvet for four-year-old brother.

Back in the old days, when Annie and Aunt Moggie went walking on Fourteenth Street, Annie thought working in a big department store must be the greatest fun in the world. Seeing and handling all those beautiful things! Watching the people. Hearing the ladies talk over which satin to buy, which hat became them best, and whether the corduroy or the cashmere coat would wear better for the baby! It never once entered her mind that it must be hard work to be a cash girl. Now she knew.

"But I won't be it very long," she mused, thinking of her copybook maxims and her father's assurances. "Some day I'll be buying silk, like those ladies. And I'll pick out the pretty patterns — not like the fat woman over there. Ooooh, what an ugly purple that is! And those thick stripes! Why doesn't she take the green with the little dots? Some day I'll —"

"Here, you!" a stern voice broke into Annie's reverie. "Can't you hear nothing? The girl's been yelling 'Cash!' for ten minutes, and you sittin' there starin'. Keep your ears open, do you hear, or you'll get the sack. Now hurry!"

Annie jumped. And hurried. She slid whenever there was room enough. It was easier on her feet. All the girls did it because it meant fewer steps on their sore soles, and more speed. But once in a while you bumped into a customer or something and then you got an awful calling down from the lady usher.

The goods this particular customer had bought — Annie never forgot it — curtain material, thin, white crossbar

stuff — was put into her hands along with the "book." In the book was a half dollar. There was to be three cents change. Annie made off toward the cashier. She skidded round a corner, collided with a woman who had suddenly stopped before a "bargain sale," and dropped the book. The half dollar rolled out, rolled away out of sight.

Annie began to hunt. The woman she had bumped helped her. Other customers did the same. No one could find it. The woman floorwalker came up and asked what the trouble was. Then she, too, started to look for the lost coin. It was not found.

The floorwalker looked at Annie — just one look. Annie's hands and feet went cold and her throat dry.

"Come along with me," she said in a low tone, leading the way to the cashier's desk. Annie breathed hard, but didn't cry. Some of the customers looked after her. One said, "Poor kid — I guess they'll dock her for it."

The floorwoman made out a slip, signed it, got the parcel wrapped and the three pennies change. Then, when all had been made right with the customer, the floorlady took Annie's arm firmly and said in a low but vigorous tone: "You're fired. Get your money to-night when the store closes and don't come back. You're a careless little girl. First you sit staring when they're yelling their lungs out calling 'Cash!' And then you lose money. You'll never do." And she moved off, presenting a dignified mien and smiling face to the patrons.

For the remainder of the day Annie moved about like a person in a trance, going through the motions of her work mechanically, but seeing nothing and hearing nothing but the floorwoman's "You'll never do."

The losing of the job was terrible enough. But the "you'll never do" sounded a sort of knell in Annie's heart. Her inclination to take with absolute literalness whatever a grown person told her was now leading her into a black pit of despair.

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Evidently the woman meant it. She really thought she'd "never do." Otherwise she would have given Annie another chance—"docked" her the half dollar and allowed her to prove her penitence and reform. This was worse than the day long ago when the baby's carriage had been stolen in front of Schultz's grocery store. Annie dreaded far more telling her mother she had lost her place than that the carriage and the stew meat were gone. The other had been an "act of Providence," like a thunderstorm, out of her control. This was *her fault*.

"Aw, wot's the matter wit' yer! Don't act like you was goin' to be moidered."

The speaker was one of Annie's sister cash girls, and the place was the airless room where the employees ate their lunches and hung their wraps.

"She's an old pig, anyway," went on the comforter. "Every one hates her. Youse don't need to worry. This place ain't nothin' so elegant. Gwan down to Keller's on Grand Street. Youse can get a job there all right. More money, too. I woiked there till we moved uptown. They pay you more money because Grand Street ain't so swell any more, and it's harder to get goils to woik there. The stores is all coming up. Look at Twenty-thoid Street—that's the swell place now. All the goils want to go up there to work. If you want to be sure of a job, you go to Keller's."

Again the magic wand! Again despair vanished and hope came. Annie even had an inspiration on her way home. She decided not to say anything to her mother about the fiasco until she had tried Keller's.

Next morning she went down there, and sure enough they needed girls. They would take her right on. They would pay \$2.50 a week. And there was no apron to wash. The girls at Keller's didn't wear aprons. There would be carfare though, which gobbled a daily dime out of the wages.

Except for the fact that Annie contributed 18 cents less



**"And when one of the girls sees a show, she tells us about it next day."**

## CHAPTER VIII

### AT LAST — \$10

“COME on, Ann, come and work in the factory with me! I can get you a place in our shop. I'll show you how to do everything. In a couple of weeks you'll be making six dollars. In six months you can earn *at least* eleven.”

Annie's friend, Yetta Kaplin, laid the most heartening emphasis on the “*at least*.” From Yetta's tone one might become almost a millionaire sewing upon white goods in a loft! Yetta waited for Annie's enthusiasm to kindle, but as no reply was immediately forthcoming she threw out other lures.

“We dance at lunch time. And when one of the girls sees a show, she tells us all about it next day. Once eight of us saved up and went to the theater — reserved seats; we got 'em two weeks in advance, right in the front row, second balcony — and after that, every day in the shop, at noontime after our lunch we'd act out all the different parts! Honest; we had more fun! Ah, come on — work in our shop,” finished Yetta coaxingly. “You won't ever make more than eight a week as a saleslady.”

“Let you know to-morrow,” was Annie's answer.

There was a lot to think about. With the closing of the store in Grand Street Annie had two paths before her, one of which she would have to choose immediately.

She lacked only a month now of being sixteen — a slim, comely girl with tendrilly brown hair, big eyes of bluish gray that still held visions, a nose of inquiring tilt and a mobile, wholesome looking mouth. Little sister was now eight, the “baby-boy” six and just beginning to be towed

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to school each morning with shining face and dragging feet.

Annie's mother had never got strong again. Month by month since her husband's death she had grown thinner, quieter. She went about her house tasks dully, toiling incessantly between meal gettings and dish washings on the neckties that still paid seven and ten cents a dozen, according to how much handwork went into their "finishing."

Even with Aunt Margaret's willing aid, making a living was a tussle. Mrs. Hargan dropped into the habit of recalling in her wistful voice, "—when Jim was alive—the days when we had full and plenty! Will they ever come again?"

Annie's old longing to be "in an office," and not a store or factory, leapt up with new vigor. But there was no time to look about for a place where an inexperienced girl could begin. Even if she found it, the wage would be less than she could earn as a sales person. No. She must take what offered.

She could get a job in a Twenty-third Street department store in the gents' hosiery at \$4.50 a week to start. In a year she would get \$5. Then \$6. If she proved capable and of pleasing personality and offended no department head or floorwalker, there would be eight, possibly ten, dollars in the weekly envelope when Annie was, say, nineteen. Annie could earn from two to five dollars a week more during that time by following Yetta Kaplin's advice. But the difference was not in mere dollars. It was the difference between two worlds!

In the department store you wore nice clothes and saw life.

In the factory you wore any old thing and became a machine.

Was the four dollars worth it?

That night Annie's mother unwittingly decided the matter for her. She fell ill. Annie, sleepless anyhow, shuttling the question back and forth in her mind—"Store

or factory; store or factory?" — heard her mother call.

"It's the pain in my back and chest — so much worse—" she explained weakly.

Annie sent her small sister round the corner for Dr. Kelley and got some plasters and hot cloths ready.

It was nothing dreadful, the old doctor said. The cold had settled deeply, that was all. She needed care and good food and oughtn't sit so much bent over her sewing.

Next day Annie got a neighbor to stay with Mrs. Hargan while she sought out Yetta Kaplin's factory. For it must be factory, not store. This was no time to wear nice clothes and watch ladies who had husbands to take care of them spend money on beautiful things. This was a time to earn, not to luxuriate.

To reach this factory Annie passed through Twenty-third Street. There was the store, its windows flowering with silks and velvets, ribbons, laces, hats. Carriages were ranged in front. And one or two of those miraculous vehicles that were just beginning to fly about the city streets without any visible motive power. "Horseless carriages" people dubbed them. And always they were occupied by beings of super-magnificence — richer, more handsomely dressed even than carriage folks.

Annie longed for the occupation that would at least bring her into over-the-counter contact with them. Perhaps some day, somehow, by just studying them and selling them things, she could learn the way to fortune and to power. There were the girls — Annie could glimpse them as the store doors swung open — with their neat skirts and blouses, their white collars, their stylishly-done hair and saleslady-like smiles, showing this or that article, giving its price, praising its quality, taking down boxes from stock or using the new-fangled trolley-baskets that slid from counters to cashiers' desks, doing the work Annie used to do in the basement at Rourke's and the upstairs at Keller's.

She turned resolutely from temptation and hurried



Annie felt exactly like one newly sent to prison.

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her footsteps toward the dingy loft building farther downtown. She reached it at last, in a side street not far from Broadway.

Instead of carriages, horseless or otherwise, heavy wagons filled this thoroughfare. The pavements were choked with the litter of commerce — packing boxes, crates, bales of goods, hand trucks and the human forces that moved and managed them. The air was filled with noise and dust. No one here was being polite and elegant. No one apparently was dreaming of the perfumed paths of life. This was the uglier mechanism by which the ladies in the carriages were provided with their staples and their luxuries. This was Annie's realm.

Beside the loft building's entrance a crude sign was twisting in the wind, scrawled with crayon upon a cardboard box cover, hung by a string to a nail:

"Learners Wanted on ladie's Waistes. Apply Circle Waist Company, top fl."

Annie went in and entered the shabby elevator, along with several errand boys, who bumped her with bundles, a few girls who were also looking for work, and a couple of smug men with good clothes and cigars which they took out from heavy lips and held in heavy, protecting hands while the cage slowly and with rickety jerks climbed upward. They looked at Annie and the other half-grown girls and brushed against them unnecessarily as they resumed their cigars and got out at the seventh floor. Annie went to the ninth.

Yes, a shirtsleeved man told her, there were two or three places for beginners. Had she any experience at machines? No? Did she know any girls there? Yetta Kaplin? Very well, she could step this way and see the foreman and maybe he'd give her a machine next to Yetta's.

Annie and the man had been talking in a small office formed by a wooden partition. There was a whirring sound and the sound of metal wheels being shoved rapidly along wooden floors. The man opened a door and sud-

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denly Annie beheld what seemed to her acres upon acres of rows of girls with bent heads sitting before zissing machines from which they never for an instant raised their eyes. The noise now became a roar. The air was hot and dusty with myriads of fine particles. It was stiffer than the basement at Rourke's department store.

Above the noise the man yelled to Annie that the foreman was at the other end of the room, and to go and see him. Annie felt exactly like one newly sent to prison. The door that closed behind her as the shirted man went back to the office was the jail gate, barring her forever from the familiar world. The motionless figures ranged at the machines were her fellow felons, chained, for all the movement they made, to rings in the floor. The foreman was the keeper. Annie half expected the whirring, snarling machines to jump and snatch at her as she made her way between two rows of them.

The foreman looked at Annie casually and said, "Learner?" Annie nodded. The man jerked his thumb toward a partition on which were hanging rows of coats and hats. She put hers there. Then he jerked his thumb again, indicating an empty place at one of the tables. As Annie went to take it she saw Yetta Kaplin was at the next machine.

Yetta smiled, stopped her work and said, "Goody! I thought you'd come." Then she got up, motioned to a boy who was trundling a huge, wheeled box of white material between the rows of machines. He came up, grabbed a handful from the truck and slapped it down beside Annie. Yetta sat down before Annie's machine, deftly picked an end of the white stuff, set it under the needle and started to stitch.

Then Annie saw that the white stuff was a chain of basted shirtwaist sleeves, joined by threads. Her job was to stitch them one after another, by dozens, by hundreds, by thousands, by millions — it seemed to Annie there was nothing

in the universe but white lawn shirtwaist sleeves that flowed from under her machine needle in an endless stream.

She sat down presently to try it herself, with Yetta and the foreman standing behind her chair. Her fingers were clammy with nervousness, her lips dry, her cheeks hot. She felt that all the other prisoners in the room were piercing her with their eyes. In reality not one was even looking in her direction.

She put her feet on the machine treadles and the thing started. It went so fast that her unsteady fingers misguided the fabric. The needle went flying off the edge of the seam and, with a sharp zip, broke.

Annie thought her heart would never stop pounding. The foreman made a pouf-f sound with his lips, threw up his hands and wagged his head disgustedly. Yetta fitted in another needle and explained something to Annie in a few words. She tried again. This time it went better. She gathered courage. Yetta turned to the man and said something in Yiddish. Presently he went away.

"You'll soon get it," shouted Yetta, though the words sounded faint and far-away to Annie. "You gotta buy your needles, anyway, so *he* don't mind. Just keep on like you're doing now and you'll be all right."

Yetta went back to her own machine. She had lost twenty minutes in Annie's behalf. Annie didn't think of it at the time. But she soon learned that every minute taken from work meant so many cents less earned at the end of the day.

By the time Annie began to "get it" and the needle she so feared was obeying her tractably, the back of her neck began to ache. From a dull pain it became a sharp torture. Then her back commenced. Then her eyes. Her fingers began to feel numb from the incessant pressure of guiding the seam. Her whole body was wracked. Unable to endure it, Annie stopped her machine and straightened herself, pressing her hands to her burning eyes.

"Bad, ain't it — at first?" sympathized Yetta, looking up without halting her machine (Yetta had the experience of two seasons' toil). "Once you're used to it, you're all right. By next week you won't feel anything."

Annie felt that she would not be alive by next week, and was too wretched to care.

But she did live until "next week," and for very many other weeks. Before five days had passed Annie could sit at her machine from eight in the morning until the noon hour stopped the whirr so abruptly the silence hurt the ears, without her eyes or her neck or her back or her fingers having any aches whatever, and again, feeling nothing, from one o'clock till six. At first she thought maybe she was paralyzed. But she had only grown used to her toil. Her bones and muscles had been forced into submission.

For the first week she was paid nothing.

"Beginners don't get no wages," said the foreman, "only we furnish the thread and the machine."

At the end of the second week Annie got \$5.90. She had earned \$6.35, but she learned that you had to buy your own thread and needles after the 'prenticeship was done. Thirty-five cents a pound for thread. Ten for needles.

Also, *you bought your own machine*. It was to be paid for at the rate of \$2 per month for *twenty months*. Then you owned it, and if you left that factory you took it away with you to some other. Yetta told Annie it was better to say nothing about these charges.

"It's done every place," she said, "and if you're fussy and ask too many questions, or if you start talking about organizing or anything like that, the foreman'll get sore on you. He got mad at me once and kept docking me for 'spoils' — waists that get a spot of oil on them or something. He'll charge you maybe 50 cents for a spoiled sleeve that ain't worth more than 15 cents. That's the way it is all over. It's best to keep your mouth shut."

Annie kept her mouth shut.

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Out of her first week's wage she paid the neighbor woman 60 cents for looking after her mother, who was now better, and set aside 50 cents toward the cost of the sewing machine. Annie walked to and from work, so there was a saving on carfare. She took a little lunch with her from home and sometimes allowed herself an extra nickel toward the tea-coffee-and-milk fund from which the shop girls bought a little something each day to eke out their noon meal and make merry with. For that first week or two Aunt Moggie helped ineffably from her ready purse and her ready heart. Dear and faithful and strong Aunt Moggie! Through every period of her life, through every trial and bewilderment, Annie clung to her with a confidence that never was misplaced, a love that never went unsatisfied.

Three months later Annie had the thrill of her life when she found ten dollars in her pay envelope for one week's work.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CLOSED DOOR

TEN dollars! Annie clutched the three-by-seven inch bit of green and white paper with the same upleap of heart a prospector feels who has sluiced out his first nugget of gold. She forgot the earning of that small oblong had cost her six days of incessant toil, following three months of merely *learning* to toil. She forgot that for it she had sat at her sewing machine fifty-four hours, her neck bent to a deep angle, her eyes fastened to the spot where the needle plunged into the fabric, her slim fingers guiding the white stream that flowed forever and ever and ever from under them to the huge basket below. She even forgot for the moment the coarse foreman, whose low forehead, leering eye and loose lips, so repulsed her; whose harsh voice sometimes startled her into running off the seam, whose touch against her shoulder made her shrink with something new and vague that frightened her.

As she walked up Broadway and then east to her poor tenement Annie kept turning the ten dollar bill into rent, into meat, into flour and potatoes and onions and tea, into shoes for her mother, a dress for Janie, a suit for little Jim-brother who was in his first grade of school.

What a glory-feeling it gave you to be the mainstay of a household! Annie thought of her father and of how he always believed if you wanted a thing badly enough and kept at it it would come true. Annie had longed to take care of the family as he had done. Now she was actually doing it!

She ran up the shaky stairs and opened the door of the Hargans' main room. The supper table was set. An oil lamp in the middle, on the red-and-white table-cloth, gave a

bit of cheeriness. The lamp was a present from Aunt Moggie. Its body was of pressed nickel and the shade porcelain, white underneath and dark green outside.

Besides the cheap china and knives and forks, there was a plate of buns and a loaf of bread — the kind that was called a "twist loaf," which eight-year-old Janie always selected because it was "pretty." On the table also was an important family trophy called the "castor." It was silver-plated, elaborately etched in flowers and scrolls, and held four bottles of condiments on a revolving centerpiece. It was one of the objects of art poor Jim Hargan had "fooled away his money on." But it was now a beloved keepsake. Janie was at the table, chewing her pencil over her next day's arithmetic lesson.

Annie smelt stew and tea in the kitchen, where her mother was moving about while Jim-boy got in her way trying to "help." Everything was poor. Everything was cheap. But it was home. And to-night it smelt warm and foody. Annie felt glad and gay. She rushed into the kitchen, hugged her mother and pressed the ten-dollar bill into her hand. Mrs. Hargan's thin, worried face lighted a little. But she was not optimistic. Perhaps she had been once. She put the money into the bosom of her dress and went on dishing up the stew.

"But, mother — ten dollars!" emphasized Annie with two sharp nods of the head. "Isn't that a lot?"

"It's splendid. You've done wonders, child. But I was only thinking," said Annie's mother as she put supper on the table, "what a little way ten dollars goes, with me only able now to make a couple of dollars with the neckties. We owe the grocer four. And there's no butter at that. I didn't dare run the bill up any higher this week. Your Aunt Margaret's already given me three. There — now sit right down while it's hot. Come, Janie, get your books off the table and tie Jim's bib on. Hurry, Annie, get your things off."



The foreman strode up to her. "What are you doing, anyhow!" he scowled. . . . "Takin' a vacation?"

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Annie felt a little quenched. She had worked so hard. She had earned so much. And then there wasn't enough! What was enough? How could she earn it?

That night she tried to think it out. Annie slept on a cot in the living room. As she lay there she could see a little strip of sky, moon-blue and spangled with stars. Her mother and the children shared the one bedroom, which had a window on a narrow airshaft.

Mrs. Hargan often said she felt selfish, having the separate room which by rights Annie should have, instead of that corner of the living room. But Annie wouldn't have exchanged her strip of sky for all the inner bedrooms in the universe.

"Now, let's see," she figured, "\$9 a month for rent — that's \$2 a week. Five dollars a week for food, including lunch to be taken to the factory; that's seven. Coal, wood, oil, say another dollar; that's eight." Medicine for her mother, shoes and stockings for Jimmie and Janie, underwear and coats and hats and dresses for them all; necessities for herself — and \$2 a week to do it with!"

She fell asleep with the problem still unsolved.

Next day at the factory she took it up again. There must be more money, that was sure. She must learn to work faster. Other girls made twelve and fourteen dollars. Yetta Kaplin did, but Yetta had been at it two seasons. Still — Annie remembered the copybook maxims and tried to square them with her situation:

"Honesty is the best policy." The factory management evidently did not think so. When a girl made a mistake in a shirtwaist sleeve it was not honest for the foreman to dock her 50 cents when the spoiled material was only worth fifteen. Why should honesty be the best policy for some and not for —

With an angry whirr the flashing needle point ran off the seam Annie was stitching. In an instant there was a bunching up of the white stuff and a snapping of the thread. In

her nervous haste to salvage it Annie pricked her finger and a red drop oozed onto the white fabric. Another "spoil" to pay for out of her slender wage! Not to mention the anger of the foreman, who was always close at hand if anything went wrong, and never about when things were singing.

At last the tangle was straightened out and Annie resumed her work and her thoughts. "As a man thinketh, so is he—" That was another of the aphorisms that comforted her. Now if only she could think how to earn more money! If she could only take lessons in shorthand and find a job—

Again the accident happened. This time with a nasty jab her needle broke, sending her nerves a-quiver. She pressed her hand to her hot forehead. This much was clear: You must not think while you sewed seams. You must make a blank of your mind, a machine of your body. A machine did not do *your* bidding. *You* must do the bidding of the machine.

Annie felt suddenly dizzy and sick. She got up and walked to the door, intending to climb the short flight of stairs to the roof for a breath of air, as the girls did sometimes at noon hour if it was warm. The door was locked, the key not there. Impatiently she went to the entrance of the fire-escape. That, too, was fastened.

The foreman strode up to her.

"What are you doing, anyhow!" he scowled, his repulsive red mouth close to Annie's ear. "Takin' a vacation? Whaddyer think we pay you for — to work or to take walks? Go on back where you belong and watch yerself! What's the matter with you to-day?"

"I — I felt bad," faltered Annie. "Couldn't I just step out in the air a minute? Shouldn't the door be unlocked?"

The man looked at her unpleasantly.

"Say, young lady," he leered, "you're a little too nosy. Think I'm goin' to leave people from downstairs sneak up here and swipe cloth and thread off us? And the girls, too

— they swipe thread and things! Didn't I lose nine dollars' worth of stuff once just for having this here door unlocked? Come now," he put a hot, pudgy hand on Annie's arm and made his tone more ingratiating, "get a drink of water and go back to your work."

The look on his face, the touch of his moist hand, the brush of his breath against her neck, sent a shudder through Annie.

"I will," she answered, to get rid of him; "I feel better now."

The fellow's loose mouth hitched up into a half smile. He gave her a parting look and moved off, his fat body almost touching the backs of the sewing girls between whom he walked.

Annie watched him an instant, then turned to the corner where stood a galvanized iron water cooler with magenta roses painted on the front. Fastened by a chain was a drinking cup. Annie washed a place on its rim near the handle where the fewest lips touched it and took a few sips.

There was a thin board partition at this end of the room. On the outer side of it hung the girls' hats and wraps. Inside were many rows of wooden shelves filled with cloth bolts and embroideries. Nearby were some crates and a few boxes containing bunches of waste and cans of machine oil. The smell of the oil cans sickened Annie. She put down the cup and went to a window a few steps off. After tugging and straining, she succeeded in raising the sash. From nine stories below came the roar of city traffic, the shouts of wagon drivers, the clang of cars.

The cool air revived her a little. She tried to get control of herself, but something terrified her. The locked doors! The brutal coarseness of the foreman. The hot, dust-laden air. The vibration of the wooden floor.

She shut the window and, rounding the partition, glanced down the workroom at the rows of bent heads, the rivers of

lawn and madras that flowed from under the insatiable needles.

Scraps of material blew about in little eddies whenever the boy passed with his wheeled crate of sleeves and collars and fronts and backs and yokes and strips of embroidery, basted and ready for the stitchers. Annie hated it all. Hated and feared it.

Still feeling smothered and trapped and helpless, but afraid to stay away longer, she went back to her place. She arranged her work mechanically and started the machine. She banished thought from her mind. She forced herself to be like the thing of wood and steel before her—an insensible mechanism which sewed and sewed and sewed and did nothing else.

That week she earned less than ten dollars. Her indulgence in thinking cost her dearly. Walking home with her eight dollars and seventy cents in a little snap purse with the dog's head stamped on its tan leather side, she felt dull and numb.

She was tired and hungry—oh, so tired. Would there be stew again for supper? Or just cabbage and bread and butter and tea? She was tired of stew. She hated cabbage. She stepped absently into a puddle and felt the cold wet of it ooze through her broken sole.

A man came striding along in the opposite direction to the home-hurrying crowd of workers. He pushed Annie so rudely that it hurt her. She stared resentfully at him with flushed face. He was heavy-set and overdressed in the style of the successful ward politician—checked suit, crisply pressed, brown derby set at an angle, expensive cigar, too much jewelry. He shoved everybody as he cut through the crowd, but especially the girls.

Annie was sure some man would hit him, and that there would be a fight, and blood, and an ambulance—all of which she loathed. But nobody did. Why *didn't* they?

Her mind reverted, as it so often did, to the copybook maxims of her schooldays.

"The meek shall inherit the earth," floated into her mind. So far as she could see, the meek got nothing but knocks. Then came the refrain of her patriotic song: "—land of the free; home of the brave!" Who was free? Why was no one brave enough to punish this man who smashed his way along, not caring whom he hurt?

It was all a jumble and a puzzle. She was too tired in body and spirit to straighten it out. Annie stumbled up her tenement stairs. When she opened the door, Aunt Moggie was there. Things were always brighter with Aunt Moggie around. There were long talks, and understanding and sympathy, and encouragement, besides all the more practical helps.

When Aunt Moggie went home Annie walked with her part of the way.

"Listen, Aunt Marg — I've got to earn more money," began Annie in a voice tense with earnestness. "I've got to get out of that factory, too. I hate it. I can't *tell* you how I hate it!"

"Why, child!" Aunt Moggie's voice was full of concern. "Is it as hard as all that?"

"Oh, I don't mind the hard work. But it's so hot and so — so locked up, and so —"

"Locked up?"

"Yes, the doors to the roof and to the fire-escapes." Annie told her aunt the episode of the afternoon. "Why, if ever a fire should start —" she broke off eloquently. "And the men are horrible, some of them. Oh, I *hate* it, Aunt Marg, I *hate* it, I *HATE* it! I want to get away. I want to learn shorthand like you, and go in an office. Oh, Aunt Moggie, *HELP* me!"

"I'll help you," said Annie's aunt in her quiet voice. The girl felt soothed and confident, as in the old days when

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Aunt Moggie had held her hand and said, "Don't be frightened at the crossing; I'll take care of you."

"I'll teach you shorthand at night. Try and stick it out at the factory a few months more, dear, and we'll see the light. Remember, perseverance conquers all things!"

Again the faith out of the old copybook maxim! Aunt Maggie promised it this time — she whose promise Annie never had known to be broken.

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#### REFERENCES

## CHAPTER X

### BRIDGING THE CHASM

BUT Annie was loath to have her hard-worked Aunt Margaret devote her evenings to teaching her the intricacies of stenography.

"No, Aunt Moggie," she said firmly, "I know now what it is to work all day at a machine. I don't care whether it's my sewing machine or your typewriter. Nine hours' work a day takes most of your strength. But I'm young; I can stand it. Besides, it's my problem. I'm going to night school. I know a girl who learned in six weeks."

Her aunt smiled grimly and shook her head.

"Yes — I've heard that," she said, "but I've never known a person who did it, Nance. It's one thing to be able to write shorthand, and another to be able to read it. Six months is nearer what you'll need."

Nevertheless, with high hope Annie registered at a school near enough to walk to from the factory. There was not time to go home for dinner, so she stopped at a dairy lunch-room after work and ate fifteen cents' worth of buns or wheatcakes and coffee, experimenting with different dishes to see which made the bulkiest and most lasting meal for the money.

It seemed to Annie in those days that she was never actually unhungry. To have as much as she wanted to eat, three times a day, alone represented in her imagination a basis for happiness.

At first night school was enlivening. The school building was new, with roomy desks, big blackboards and very bright lights. The teacher was young and brisk and wore pretty white shirtwaists with elbow sleeves. That sort of waist,

Annie knew, was the \$18-a-dozen line. That is, the men who ran the Circle Waist Company, where she worked, got \$18 a dozen for that style. They paid Annie 75 to 80 cents a dozen for making them, not counting the sleeves and the hemming round the bottom. That was separate work. The girls who sewed the sleeves got 16 cents a dozen pairs. Hemming brought 4 cents per dozen waists. When a girl became expert enough to make three or four dozen waists a day she was generally taken off piecework and paid by the week — about \$12 a week.

For the first few nights Annie was stimulated by the novelty of her study. It seemed a miracle that those straight lines and curves could in time mean words and phrases, and be read as clearly and rapidly as print. But as the lessons progressed from the simple "pee-bee; chay-jay; kay-gay; sh-zh," to the joined consonants, "p-k; b-g," etc., and the complex addition of the dotted and dashed vowels, Annie felt her brain functioning stiffly. *She had schooled herself in the factory not to think.* When she tried to think she ran off the seam, her thread snapped, her needle broke. She was reprimanded by the floor manager. She lost time and earned less money. Her mind had forfeited its nimbleness.

To change over from manual to mental labor Annie found to be a task of far greater difficulty than she dreamed. There seemed an unbridgeable chasm between.

"You must put your mind on your lesson, Miss Hargan," said a voice at her elbow. "You have written 'back' for 'Jack.' Don't you know yet that 'b' slants from left to right and 'j' from right to left?"

Annie pulled herself together, the nerves throughout her weary body strained to their utmost effort. The next night it was even worse. An unconquerable lassitude gripped her. She felt numb and indifferent. Her brain refused to be whipped into action. Her eyelids drooped.

"Come, come — I can't have pupils falling asleep over

their work! Miss Hargan! I'm surprised at you. You'll have to do better than that."

The rebuke galvanized Annie from her doze. It took every bit of will power to keep awake and go through the motions of her composing, copying, transcribing. That night as she stumbled upstairs and fell into bed her courage almost failed. She was too exhausted to rest, and tossed about till daylight.

The next day an announcement was made at the factory that power was to be installed. The old foot-treadle machines were to go. Electrically driven ones were to take their places. The girls were told it wouldn't take them long to learn the new method, and they could turn out a great deal more work.

True, they would lose the money they had put into the purchase of the foot machines. But the new ones would be furnished without cost. All they would have to pay for would be the power — 25 cents a week.

It cost the company at the rate of 14 cents. But the girls didn't know this.

The "power machines" were terrible at first. They went so fast. They rushed you so. They were so insatiable in gobbling material; so merciless when anything went wrong.

Annie learned to run the new monster, though she felt it was more her master than she the master of it. The floor manager — he of the loose lips and hot, moist hand — announced that she could now work by the week, instead of on piecework. He would pay her twelve.

The family needed the money desperately, for Mrs. Hargan was now too frail to do more than the sketchiest house-work and see a little after the two younger children. Besides, the twelve dollars would be regular in coming, and Annie felt she would not have to work under such constant pressure and would have more energy at night for her stenography.

as for her dream of "less pressure." The floor man-and often the partners themselves, the two sharp-l, rat-eyed men who ran the Circle Waist Company, lled a system of incessant watching that sweated the oyees more cruelly than ever.

"Here—keep your eyes on your work," would come dmonition, as one or other of the men walked up and between the rows of bent girls at the machines.

You better woik a little fester, Miss, if you wanna keep job. Mind your thread there! And watch yerself that embroidery. You ain't sewing carpets; that's a -quality lady's waist you got there!"

illy and doggedly Annie toiled. Dully and doggedly tragged herself to night school, her mind growing more wornly resistant to study every day. One evening a of visitors came to the school and were shown around e principal. They were beautifully dressed and wore jewelry. They commented pleasantly upon this and

To Annie's numbed perceptions, as she sat in the o w of classroom benches, trickled a sentence or two: ese are high school girls, preparing for professional ? How interesting! Splendid! The city does so owadays for its children. I often think if girls who factories would spend the energy in improving their n that they spend in strikes and trouble-making gen-ney'd get on so much better. They're always com-about their small wages; yet what do they do to themselves?"

he tortured brain suddenly gave a bound. She saw n red. Without knowing what she did, she leaned half choked with tears and anger:

"You!" she gasped, "you with your lovely clothes! your money and no need for effort! What do — oh, God!"

ld at her own voice and her wild, inarticulate nie's nerves gave way entirely. She dropped

back into her seat and burst into hysterical crying, her face buried in her arms.

There was a little commotion. The teacher in the pretty shirtwaist ushered the wealthy ladies out into the corridors with many apologies and explanations. Annie was told to go home. Which she did, wet-eyed and sobbing. That is, she went to her Aunt Margaret's, and, with pathetic gulps and breath-catchings, told her of the incident in school.

"Dear," said Aunt Margaret, fixing her bed for Annie to lie down on and patting the pillow invitingly, "you've got to play a little. You'll be old before you've ever been young. You're only seventeen, Nancie, and there's worry in your eyes. I know what it is. I've"—a half-suppressed sigh here—"I've been through it. I want *you* to have some good times—and to marry and be happy with a home and children. Now take two or three nights a week to have fun in."

Aunt Moggie followed up her advice with tickets to the theater once or twice. They went together and sat in the fifty-cent seats upstairs. But Annie's mother protested that "*she* never got taken anywhere, and that the money was more needed for the house, anyhow, than for pleasures that cost so much."

Annie felt guilty, and when Yetta Kaplin next urged an oft-repeated suggestion that they go together to "a grand dance place" she knew of, Annie agreed to go.

I. Fidelbaum's Select Dancing Academy was on East Broadway. It was up a flight of stairs above a café adorned with a sign in colored electric lights. You could hear music and laughter before you got halfway to the double doors of the entrance, where rusty red curtains shut off the draught.

There was a long room with many mirrors, mostly cracked, all more or less dirty. Red plush seats ran along three walls. At the back on a small platform was the music—two fiddles, a clarinet and piano badly out of tune.

The lights glared horribly and it was very hot, with a haze of smoke from cheap cigars and cigarettes.

A dance was just finishing as Annie and Yetta came into the stuffy anteroom, where hats and coats were left. Several garishly-dressed young girls were there, powdering their faces before a looking-glass. All the girls in the dancing room were overdressed in cheap imitations of prevailing styles — exaggerated, of course. There were Jewish girls, Italian girls, Gentile girls, all of the factory type, all noisily laughing and chatting. There were many couples sitting close together on the red plush benches.

The boys were of two types. Most of them were poorly clothed, homely and awkward, smiling painfully at introductions, at a loss to know how to dispose of hands and feet, stumbling through the dances and flocking with other ungainly lads between numbers. These were the working boys from factory and shop.

The other young men were slim and sleek and well dressed — too noticeably so. Their hair was shiny-neat, like their patent leather shoes. Their clothes were of the kind seen in dashing clothiers' windows labeled "nobby" or "the latest." These lads were sharp-eyed, but easy of manner. They were never at a loss for words that interested the girls they singled out for attention.

Yetta, who had been to Mr. Fidelbaum's dances a number of times, introduced Annie to some of the girls and their escorts. Yetta was at home there and popular. She knew how to take care of herself and had a keen relish for what she called "puttin' some of them fresh guys in their places." She wanted Annie to have a good time, too, and before she undulated out upon the floor for a dance she brought up a lonely youth and presented him.

He was one of the ill-dressed ones, clumsy and self-conscious. He invited Annie to "take a turn." She struggled about the room with him once, but his heavy feet botched the waltz so badly that Annie made an excuse and "sat out"



**He was one of the ill-dressed ones, clumsy and self-conscious.**

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the rest in uncomfortable tête-à-tête. She raked her brain for something to talk about, but the boy's monosyllables exasperated her. Turning away in desperation, she found herself looking into the smiling face of a young man on her other side.

"How do?" he said easily. "I t'ink we met before, didn' we? Don't you know Mr. Weiss — great friend of mine. I must 'a met you at his sister's. Let's have this dance."

Before she realized it, Annie and the youth were whirling about the hot room. He could dance, this fellow, but he held Annie too closely. She could scarcely keep her cheek from touching his. His warm hand pressed against her back. Whenever she tried to squirm a little out of his clutch, he would make her some compliment and hold her tighter still.

"You're a born dancer, Miss — er — Johnson, ain't it? Oh, yes, sure — Hargan. Light's a feather! You get that back-dip fine. Live around here?"

Annie told him she lived uptown further and had come with her friend Yetta, who worked in the same shop. He said, "Sure," again, genially.

The music stopped and the young man — he said his name was Callberg, Irving Callberg — led Annie to a place in the corner of the red plush divan. He sat very close to her and talked a great deal. He told Annie she was the "best looker" in the room, and had more "chick" than most girls on Fifth Avenue. Annie tried to avoid touching him, but every time she moved he followed. His breath fanned her face unpleasantly. He put his hand upon her knee and said, "You stick along with me, I'll give you a grand time."

The lights, the heat, the noise, the whole atmosphere of the place sickened Annie almost physically. Her throat ached with the dust. Her lips went dry with nervousness. She wanted to get out. Yetta Kaplin was at the other end

of the room having a gay time in a group. The young man at Annie's side suddenly hailed a passing waiter.

"Hey, Sam, bring a coupla pink ones — make one sweet, see?"

Annie would have fled there and then if she could have afforded to go without her hat and coat. The drinks came on a wet tin tray and the young man urged her to take "just a sip — there ain't nothin' in it but soft stuff." Annie "sipped," trying to think how she could get away and out into the fresh air.

She had never had a drop of alcohol in her stomach before. She turned dizzy, but she knew the young man would keep her from going if she admitted she felt badly.

"Oh, it's delicious!" she said, managing a smile. "Hold this a second till I get my handkerchief. I'll be right back."

She dashed wildly to the cloakroom, seized her things and flew for the stairs. The young bounder saw her as she slipped from the dressing room and tried to head her off. Annie plunged down, two steps at a time, and reached the street, dazed and palpitating.

## CHAPTER XI

"WHERE'S A GIRL TO GO?"

"WHAT was the matter with you last night to the dance, Annie—runnin' out like that? Gee—you'd a thought we all had smallpox, the way you beat it!"

It was lunch time at the factory. The girls were chatting of what they'd done the night before. Yetta Kaplin, a bit of herring held between thumb and finger, was the speaker.

"Yeah—I seen you, too," put in another girl, glancing at Annie. "I think Fidelbaum's is a swell place. You can have a good time there."

"Oh, it was so hot," said Annie, feeling excuses necessary, "and I ain't a very good dancer. That young fellow—what was his name, Callberg—"

"Oh, Irv Callberg! You shouldn't mind him, Ann; he don't mean nothing. Just give him a slap when he gets fresh. Was *that* why you broke your neck leavin'?"

Annie didn't answer except with a friendly glance at Yetta. She liked Yetta. And the other girls, too. But she knew she couldn't make them understand how she felt about Fidelbaum's and Callberg, and the drinks, and all.

Perhaps Yetta read her thoughts.

"I ain't crazy about Fidelbaum's, neither," she said. "But you gotta go some place. What are you going to do if no fella asks you out? We ain't got no parlor or li'bry, or droring room at our house, and the conservatory's closed for repairs," she added with grim humor. "There's nowhere to receive a fella if he calls. Whatcha going to do?"

That was it. What was a girl to do? There was no corner in Annie's house to bring a young man, even if she

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knew one. Yet her home, with its three rooms and only her mother and the two children, was a palace compared to Yetta's. The Kaplins had what was colloquially called a "room bedroom"—a main room and one boxlike chamber opening off it, ventilated through the living room. And the Kaplins were father, mother, Yetta and three younger ones.

A pretty little Jewess, with thoughtful eyes and brow, sitting at the edge of the group and eating a shade more daintily than the rest, spoke up.

"There's the Settlement House," she said. "It's nice. There's games and books and a piano and pictures and curtains and lamps and flowers. And you can invite boys in on Tuesday nights. Sometimes Miss Wells has friends of hers from uptown, and they sing or talk to us, or have lantern lectures."

A few of the girls curled their lips and ate their sausage sandwiches without comment. They had their own views of settlement houses, and the red-bloodedness of the entertainment provided. Annie pricked up an ear. Her whole soul was athirst for a little pleasure. She thought it would be wonderful to know "some fella" who would "take her to places" and be nice to her. She thought with a shudder of the hot hand and loose lips of the shop foreman who was always either leering or scolding. And of the unpleasant breath of Irv Callberg fanning her cheek as he paid her coarse compliments at the dancing academy. Maybe at this Settlement House there'd be some one different.

She got the address from the girl and a few evenings later went, timidly and alone. It was Saturday, and there was no session of the night school which Annie from sheer exhaustion had been attending but irregularly since her outburst at the visiting lady.

The Settlement House consisted of two reconstructed old-fashioned dwellings in the midst of a seething tenement district east of the Bowery. At the entrance of one of the



Annie, startled, looked up at a red-faced young man.

basement doors was a neat white sign: "Mothers' Club. Meetings from 7 to 9 P. M. Free. Welcome." At the other were two placards: "Kindergarten" and "Nurses' Department. Free Advice."

Annie decided the stoop entrance was the one for her. The door was unfastened. She opened it and found herself in a reception hall from which opened an attractively furnished room. Her first impression was of unbelievable spaciousness and cleanness.

She drew a long breath and looked into the big room. She got a quick picture of gray-blue walls and hangings, and golden lamplight glowing upon a long table, at which girls were reading. Without examining the furnishings in detail, she felt the quality of everything. She knew that the pictures hanging in discreet spaces were good pictures, well framed. That the tables and chairs and bookcases were of artistic rightness, though very plain. All was quiet, orderly, warm and handsome. So much so that Annie felt vaguely uncomfortable and afraid of it.

As she stood hesitating in the wide doorway a woman came into the room from an opposite door and walked toward Annie with an inquiring smile. Annie noticed her shirtwaist before she noticed her face. It was an expensive blouse of soft silk, well fitted and immaculate. Annie appraised it to be of the \$30-a-dozen type. Her firm didn't make that line.

"Looking for some one? Or one of the classes?" the woman asked.

"No, ma'am," Annie hesitated. "One of the girls at the shop told me — said I could come here."

"Oh, yes. Certainly. Come right in. I am Miss Wells. This is one of the gathering rooms. There is a larger library in the adjoining house. The auditorium is at the back on this floor. And the classes are upstairs in both houses. Did you wish to join one of the classes, perhaps — literature, English, music?"

Annie thanked her and said she'd be glad to think about it a little later, but would just look around — and — and maybe find her friend. Miss Wells was very nice and told her she was welcome, and that some of the girls were having games, and to make herself at home. Then with an assured and busy smile she went on her way.

The girls looked up from their reading, and as Annie felt shy and self-conscious, she walked through into the adjoining house. There to her relief she found her studious little Jewish friend of the shop. The girl took her around and introduced her to a number of others. They joined in some games and later looked into the auditorium, where a group was just finishing the rehearsal of a play to the accompaniment of many giggles from girls who were to do boys' parts.

Everything was very nice, indeed, at the Settlement House. The girls were nice, the games were nice, the place was nice — lovely, in fact. Miss Wells was nice, though she had not impressed Annie as particularly winning or easy to get acquainted with; "not folksy," as her mother would have expressed it. On her solitary way home Annie wondered why she was not more enthusiastic about coming next Tuesday, as her friend had insisted she do.

"There'll be a concert, and you can invite any boy you like."

If she only knew a boy to ask! How did other girls get acquainted with "fellows"? They "went to places," of course. Like Fidelbaum's. Or else they knew girls who had brothers. Or they belonged to a social club. Or —

"G'd evening. Nice night. Don't be in such a hurry!"

Annie, startled, looked up at a red-faced young man who was walking at her elbow. He "tipped" his derby and gazed at Annie with a complacent grin. He was not bad looking or badly dressed. In her undefined loneliness and discontent Annie had a crazy impulse to adventure a little way into this thing the girls at the factory called a

"pick-up," and discussed with many titters at lunch hour.

"I don't know you," said Annie in a half-defiant, half-inviting tone.

"That's easy fixed," responded the man readily. "Jake Miller's my name. What's yours?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter what mine is."

"Have it your own way," shrugged the man. "Been working late?"

"No, I been to the Settlement House. I just got off the car."

A vague plan began forming in Annie's mind. Of course desirable young men did not scrape acquaintance in the street with girls. But mightn't there be exceptions? If only this one *was* an exception — a "nice fellow." After all, how did being introduced change a person? Irv Callberg had been introduced.

"What's a settlement house?" asked the young man at her side; they were almost at Annie's door now. "What do they settle?"

Annie smiled accommodatingly at his jest and explained that it was "really very, very nice there, and they have entertainments and classes and reading rooms and boys are welcome Tuesday evenings." Annie had a feeling that if this unceremonious acquaintance could be steered into the discreet atmosphere of Miss Wells's settlement house, all irregularities and questionable features would be removed. "There's to be a concert Tuesday." Wistfulness was in Annie's voice. Oh, if this only *could* be an adventure — a nice one, not like what happened at Fidelbaum's dancing hall! "Would you care to come, perhaps, Mr. Miller?"

"Ah, shucks! And watch a lot of sissies play bean-bag? Not much! Say, you're too pretty to be wasting your time at those charity joints. Come on with me. I know a nice, refined place that we can get a bite to eat. I can see you're a nice girl. I wouldn't take you nowhere but a nice place. Come on, sis, have a little sense. I ain't going to eat you

— though you're sweet enough!" He smiled engagingly. Annie swallowed the lump in her throat.

"Good night!" she cried, and turning into her tenement door she stumbled up the ramshackle stairs, disgusted with herself, frightened for fear steps were following her, feeling tired and discouraged, baffled on every hand.

Annie went to the Settlement House on Tuesday night, alone. Her factory friend was there, accompanied by a youth wearing thick eyeglasses. The two seemed absorbed in each other and in books and things of which Annie knew nothing. She enjoyed the concert by Miss Wells's uptown friends, but she longed for some one to sit with, to talk to — some one who liked her as the eyeglassed young man liked her friend from the shop.

Later Miss Wells brought up several mild-looking youths and presented them to Annie and some other girls. They talked a little, but Annie didn't feel she had impressed any one much. By and by she wandered into the reading-room, found an illustrated magazine and sat down under a lamp to look it over.

"Good evening; I hope you enjoyed the music?"

Annie glanced up and saw a good-looking man of thirty or so, whom she recognized as one of Miss Wells's friends "from uptown." In fact, he had accompanied on the piano several of the singers, and Annie had watched and listened with yearning enjoyment.

"Oh, good evening! Indeed I did!" Annie spoke jerkily, embarrassed but wistfully eager for notice. "It was — wonderful. You played the piano. Oh, you do play beautifully."

The man laughed easily, sitting jauntily upon the arm of a chair near Annie, and talked for a little. He asked Annie which selections she liked best. And when she told him he said she had good taste.

He asked about her work, told her he was an illus-

trator — drew pictures for newspapers and books. He made her talk, set her at ease, and seemed interested in everything she told him. He talked of Miss Wells, and repeated several times that she was "a marvelous woman doing a marvelous work." Annie liked him so much that she tried to agree and take his viewpoint, although personally she had been unable to "cotton," as she termed it, to Maud Wells.

The young man moved on after a while, seeing some one he wanted to speak to, and Annie sat with the closed magazine in her lap, thinking.

She had never had a conversation with any one like that before in her life. And how kind he had been, how — what was the word? — democratic! She shut her eyes and recalled every detail of his face, figure and clothes. He had on such beautiful clothes. Annie always noticed people's clothes the first thing. She had suffered so in childhood with "funny-looking" garments — made of samples that didn't quite match, and petticoats of unbleached muslin with "Fruit-of-the-Loom" stamped on in blue, and sometimes an actual picture of fruit pasted right on the goods — that nice clothes impressed her as the first essential of well-being. This young man's clothes — his name was Herbert Travis — were of fine dark blue serge, exquisitely pressed and aristocratic looking. His shirt was white, with immaculate collar and cuffs fastened with smooth gold links. His shoes were slim and just polished enough to be, Annie felt, in perfect taste like everything at Miss Wells's Settlement House.

Every evening after that, when Annie was not at her shorthand class, she went to the Settlement House. Perhaps Mr. Travis would be there, and speak to her again. Perhaps through that settlement house life might fulfill some promises.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GARDEN OF DREAMS

**I**N these days of her life — Annie was almost seventeen — her thoughts and aims were of two sorts. There were the wishes she would have "wished" if a fairy had promised to wave a wand and bring anything desired — books, a piano, a room with pink wallpaper and cretonne curtains with roses on them, silk frocks and stockings, a suit made individually for her by a tailor, a dashing lover-prince, and plenty of candy and matinees. Those were the abstract wishes of every girl. But Annie's immediate concerns were commonplace things — food, any kind, so long as there was enough of it — shoes that didn't let in the wet, rest, sleep, fresh air and fun. Oh, for some good times! For a "fellow" who was clean and respectful, wore neat clothes, loved her and kept asking her to marry him! Those were the concrete wishes, the things she felt might be gettable.

Yet the only thing she had was work. She was numb with it, sick with it. All day there was nothing but work. Then came night school, with Annie pounding her forehead to make the thoughts come, and failing, and falling asleep at her desk, and waking with a start, and feeling beaten and maddened and helpless because her brain would not do her bidding.

When she got home everything there was dreary. Her mother was becoming more and more of an invalid, querulous and depressed. She took a gloomy view of life and constantly lamented the brighter times "when Jim was alive."

This tortured Annie. The words would echo dimly in her mind as she sat at her machine hour after hour, her one

effort being to stitch faster, faster, so as not to hear the prodding voice of the floor manager, "Don't be looking up so much. Keep your eyes on your work. The examiner found three run-offs in your yokes yesterday."

When her father was alive and Annie was eight, how they had built air castles together, this optimistic ne'er-do-well of forty, and his small, hopeful girl! At seventeen, Annie had dreamed, they would be living in that "flat with all light rooms," and wearing lovely clothes, and "taking trips to Europe," and mother would have a pair of "real diamond" earrings. Ah, yes, that was all to happen, and more besides — vague, wonderful things like love, that Annie only brushed with her thoughts.

And here she was stitching waists at twelve dollars a week! If she didn't earn more it would not be long before her little sister would have to go into the shops. No! That must never happen, Annie told herself with set teeth. There must be some way found to keep the children at school until they could emerge with a fair equipment for life.

Thus Annie toiled and thought and floundered along at night school, learning her shorthand with painful slowness and spending two or three evenings at Miss Wells's Settlement House.

Whenever Herbert Travis was there a strange, warm glow came into her heart and filled her whole being. Whenever a door opened she hoped it might be he, and would glance furtively up. If it was, a great thrill swept through her. She could feel the blood pounding in her head back of her eyes, in her ears, in her rosy cheeks. Everything about him, from his sleek hair to his good-looking shoes, was not only perfect but bore a sort of magic, as if from some unknown, superior world, yet actually crossing the invisible barriers and becoming part of *her* world. She yearned to touch his hair, to rumple it adoringly, then smooth it back again. To touch his hands, so well kept and

strong looking. The wild thought frightened her, sent her into panic for fear he might perceive it.

If he came toward her, she had both the desire to run away and to stay, that he might come nearer, speak to her maybe. And when he did, she was gripped by a dreadful nervousness. If he passed by, she was borne down with disappointment.

Travis seemed unconscious of all this tumult. He was kind and talked often to Annie, easily, interestedly. She made heroic efforts to be animated, to say the right things, to laugh in the right place when he was amusing. One evening he told Annie about trips he had made to London and Paris, to Italy and Switzerland. He and some other college fellows had tramped "all over Switzerland," he said. It was a wonderful way to spend a vacation. He intended going again some day.

"It would be a great wedding trip," he laughed. And Annie's heart gave such a leap that she knew this time he would surely notice her agitation. But he didn't. He talked on delightfully about this and that, about Miss Wells's work and how "wonderful" it was. He drew Annie out about her own poor work. She tried to be interesting, even humorous, telling things that happened at the factory in lunch hour, when the girls "acted out" parts of plays they had seen, and made feasts and decorated the sewing machines with smilax and white ribbon when a girl got married. Instinctively she felt she must not present the gloomy side. Long ago she had learned that people are bored with grievances.

Annie was thrilled and overjoyed at holding Mr. Travis's attention, even making him *laugh!* For days afterward, every time she thought of it the surging wave that was almost an ache would sweep over her.

She began to construct a little dream world into which she crept when the factory seemed unbearable and home particularly drear. She never dared crystallize into thoughts

these nebulous imaginings. It was all vague and beautiful and made a sort of luminous background to her life like a rich tapestry on a dull wall before which dull people moved.

There were other pleasant features of Settlement House besides Mr. Travis. And Annie gleaned from it all—from the tepid games, from the books and magazines, the occasional concerts, the well equipped rooms. She furnished in her mind the home she was to have some day, with plain wallpaper, straight brown chairs, simple hangings, bits of brass catching the light here and there. . . .

It was "improving," a word Annie heard used by some visitors from uptown. But, after all, it didn't seem to help you get anywhere.

There were no classes in stenography, only in literature, English and art, and when Annie went to them they wearied her. She noticed that the girls who got the most out of Settlement House were those who followed closely in the train of Miss Wells, its founder and head. Girls with soulful eyes and bulging foreheads (like her friend from the factory who told her first about the place) "got on" with Miss Wells and were made pets of. Annie decided they were more literary than she, and had special gifts that showed off well under cultivation. She had no gifts that shone at entertainments.

Annie tried to like Miss Wells, but she never managed to make herself a favorite. She was talking of her one day at the shop during lunch hour. A swarthy-faced, fiery-eyed girl, who worked near Annie and was now seated beside her eating a roll with a piece of smoked fish in it, cut into Annie's praise with a snort of contempt:

"Huh—you make me sick with that talk," said she. "You think it's fine of her to go spending her father's cash to help the working girls! How did her rich father make his cash already! Ask her that! Ask her how his employees were treated! Ask how much wages he paid them! My father was killed in a mill her father owned. He got caught in machinery that should of been made different—

fixed so it couldn't hurt the men. There's dozens of men hurt in his mill every month and nobody ever hears a word about it. Her settlement house! Pah — I'd like to see it crumble in pieces!

"She talks about what she does for us poor girls! *What* does she do for us? Pretty things, yes. Sticks a few picshures around. Makes a few games. Gets up concerts with the girls in them and fools them that they're getting a whole lot!"

"She tells you how to 'improve yourself.' You should read good books and go to nice amusements! Let her get more pay for us girls, and we'll take care of the improvin'. We'd 'improve' ourselves if we had the price. We like nice things — music and picshures and that. But we don't want to kow-tow to her, and trail after her with grins and compliments, and promise to do everything she says.

"You can go lick her shoes like a little dog, if you like, and eat the sugar lumps she hands out to you. But you'll never see *me* at her place. I don't want that kind of a chance to 'improve.' I want a chance to **LIVE** and get food enough and clothes enough, and a decent place to sleep! Ask her father how much rent he gets for the tenements we live in. Ask her father how much wages he pays the men in his mill — the men that got killed workin' fer him! Pah! I want my own life, not the kind of a life she thinks I oughter have!" And the girl gnawed fiercely at her herring sandwich, her eyes narrowed with anger, full of hate and defiance and discontent.

She didn't often talk, this girl. When she first came to the Circle Waist Company she tried to organize the girls into a union. She talked of "sweating" and "exploitation" and "strikes." She talked "socialism" which Annie began to think must mean deliverance for the poor, since the rich opposed it so. But she was promptly warned that if she "opened her mouth again about trade unions" she'd be "sent flying." She had smoldered ever since.

Annie listened, only half understanding, but somehow she

suddenly remembered the locked doors at the two entrances, the piles of inflammable materials behind the board partition —

She crept for solace into her little dream world, the refuge her imagination had built to play in, her garden of dreams with the high wall around it so no one could see in. She thought of Herbert Travis and how he smiled down into her face and told her she had "an admirable intellect" and a "fine artistic sense, really," and that there were "all sorts of chances in the world for a girl like her."

The old, eternal hope. The promise that never seemed to fulfill itself! Only now it seemed a wild, wonderful, glorious, golden vision, too dazzling even to be looked at closely. . . .

The noon hour ended. Annie went back to her whirring machine and her mind became blank.

It was one of her night school days. Annie dragged herself wearily to the stenography class, promising herself to look in at the settlement afterward. The thought helped her through her slow "dictation," her limping transcription.

The Settlement House was bright and inviting. Annie thought resentfully of the dark-browed shop girl's arraignment. She went eagerly in. Was "he" there? Not in the reading room. Nor in the auditorium. No, he wasn't there to-night. Yes — he was. There he was, just coming into the library now! He greeted Annie with "Ah — how's my little friend with the Irish eyes and the sense of humor to-night?"

"Very well, sorr, may it plaze your majesty," smiled Annie.

They dropped into a little conversation, Annie gathering courage at his pleasantries and the apparent success of her own efforts to be gay. Miss Wells came through the room, paused, smiled her icy smile and asked Mr. Travis if he would mind helping her in the music room a minute with something she was planning.

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Annie turned happily to the magazines and later joined a group of girls she had got to know.

"Wonder if things'll go on just the same, after?" one of the girls was saying.

"Sure they will," put in another. "Why, they're goin' to take a flat down here and live right in a tenement house, as if they didn't have a cent."

"After — what?" asked Annie of the girl who had spoken first.

"Why, after the wedding. Didn't you know they was engaged, Miss Wells and Mr. Travis? Ain't you the sleepy one! We knew it a week ago!"

Annie felt as though some one had struck her between the eyes. A sickening shock went through her from head to foot. Then her brain slowly righted itself, and she looked out upon a universe appallingly jumbled and dark. Her dream-world, her little beautiful secret garden, was gone. Nothing was left but work. The factory, night school, home. Factory, night school, home.

The chattering group reached out and drew her along. "Come on — we're going to congratulate Mr. Travis and wish Miss Wells happiness. That's the way you do it, congratulations to the groom, happiness to the bride — I read it in the etiquette column!"

The girls hurried on. Annie dropped out and slipped into a corner quiet and dark. What a fool, fool, FOOL she had been! She was just a factory girl. Not even a stenographer — oh, if she'd only been that! But there was the chasm still to cross. He was a gentleman from uptown being "nice" to a working girl whom he encouraged with compliments that he felt would help her get on in the world.

She heard the swish of skirts. Miss Wells. She saw Annie, stopped, came to her, smiling complacently and holding out her hand.

"The girls have been congratulating me," she said.  
"You dear girls!"

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Annie mumbled something.

"You dear girls," repeated Miss Wells, patting Annie's shoulder. "I hope," she added, looking soberly into her face, "that *you* will marry happily, too, some day. Choose a man from your own world, Annie. Some good, steady, industrious, worthy fellow, who will make a home for you. Isn't there some young man in the shop where you work, for instance? Ah—I'm sure there is! Must you go? Well, good-night, and thank you!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### JUST HANGING ON

MISS WELLS'S words fell upon Annie like blows. The settlement worker would have been astonished to know that her well-meant advice to "marry some industrious man in your own world, some nice fellow from the shop, who will make a good home for you," roused fierce pain and anger in the breast of Annie Hargan, factory hand.

With a mighty effort Annie kept back her tears. "Yes, ma'am — that is — thank you —" she stammered. And without another look into the placidly handsome face of Miss Wells, fled into the street.

With clenched hands and bitten lips she stumbled along, anywhere, through any street. Tears spilled miserably despite her struggle to stop them, rolling down her round young cheeks, clinging to her thick lashes. She flung them off with the back of her hand. Her throat ached with suppressed sobs. Her forehead was hot with the chaotic thoughts behind it.

"Marry some time and be happy —" Miss Wells's words echoed maddeningly. "Some nice young man from your world —" What did that woman know about Annie's world? Annie's opportunities? Annie's life? Annie's dreams?

Above all things, Annie wanted to get out of her world and into somebody else's — a world of light and cleanliness, of decent food and clothes, of happiness and love, like Miss Wells's world. Miss Wells had not *earned* the money she spent. Yet she had everything to earn money with — health, education, opportunity, the equipment that gave a

girl a chance to live. Not just to *keep alive*, but to feel the zest of living and working because something came of it.

Nothing came to Annie. It was all drudgery, with only a bare drab existence to show for it. How easy, how *very* easy, it was to be good, and to do good, when you were happy and rich yourself!

"I guess there's no way to be happy and rich," thought Annie, hurrying aimlessly along, wet eyed and wretched, "unless you're born so."

A burst of laughter startled her. A group of girls and young men, giggling, all talking at once, and slapping at one another with crude playfulness, came by. Annie recognized two of the girls as fellow shop workers. Cuff stitchers they were, and apparently contented enough with their monotonous work. Like Yetta, they were satisfied with such pleasures as offered outside factory hours — the dance halls, the cheap, greasy restaurants of the East Side, trolley rides carefully picked because they cost only "one fare" and led through long stretches of open country where you could take your hat off and sing and let your hair blow, and laugh a lot, and it didn't matter if the fellows put their arms around you.

Annie would have slunk by to avoid showing her reddened eyes, but they saw her and noisily dragged her into the party.

"Ah, come — whaddyer doing mooning along like you'd lost your last friend! Come on with us, we got two extra fellers. We're goin' down to Coney."

They performed some sketchy introductions. "Meet my friend, Mister Umflughfmomm," and "This is Fred and this is Frank; now don't get them mixed." "Shake hands with Mr. Whatjer-say-your-name-was-again? Oh, yes, Mr. Smith. Meet Mr. Smith, Annie." Then more giggles and titters and slappings.

In her recoil from the Settlement House, Annie longed for diversion in any form that would make her forget. This

boisterous party did not appeal to her, but the two girls she knew were always whispering at the factory of the "fun last night" and the "gra-a-and time" of the night before. Perhaps they did have fun. She mustn't be too particular. What else was there to do except go home? And home — ugh!

Before she realized it she was climbing onto a car with the rest, wedging herself into a seat. The more squeezed together they were the more they joked and shouted. The car swayed and bumped them as it flew along nearer and nearer the salt-smelling shore.

They didn't go near the shore, though, when they reached "the Island." Nobody wanted to look at the sea. They linked arms and joined the surging mass of people walking up and down the raucous thoroughfare called Surf Avenue. They chewed gum. They exchanged cheap banter in the current slang and had "jokes" on one another.

The girls, except Annie, were dressed for the occasion, everything they wore being exaggerations of what happened to be in vogue, on the principle that if a drop of perfumery were pleasing, a cupful would be more so. Wide, round hats called "Merry Widows" were the mode that season. So the factory girls wore them twice as wide as the women on Fifth Avenue. They were always colliding, always scraping the boys' faces with their stiff straw edges, which evoked more gales of laughter and more playful slaps.

They were pushed and jostled, lost hold of one another, and caught on again with shrieks of laughter. They peered into the free shows where groups were sitting at sloppy tables drinking beer and listening to fat soubrettes who danced grievously and sang worse. They rode on a roller-coaster, the girls clinging frantically to the boys they paired off with, and screaming with excitement at the breath-taking dips. The youths after a discreet withdrawal to discuss finances, purchased "hot dog" sandwiches and beer all around. And there was more hilarity than ever after that.

Annie tried to "keep up" with the rest and feel she was having "a good time." She laughed a great deal and managed by hook and crook to keep several of the lads interested enough to fend off that most dreaded of fates to the young —being a wallflower.

Accidentally she caught sight of a clock. Both its hands were on twelve. Midnight! She was dumbfounded. How could it be that late? The hot streets and alleys were still crowded. The lights still blazed, the merry-go-rounds blared their hideous din, the "barkers" for the nickel shows croaked their ballyhoos with unimpaired vigor.

Annie plucked one of her girl friends by the sleeve and in a frightened undertone mentioned the hour. She was already wondering what her worried mother would say when she reached home, for she usually got in from the Settlement House before ten.

"Oh, forget the time! Who's worryin'? Leave us have fun without thinking about to-morrow morning! Hey, Fred, your lady friend here is cryin' to go home."

"Fred" took Annie engagingly by the elbow and with his red face bent close to hers said: "Whassamatter, ain't you having a good time? Don't be a killjoy. You stick to me and you'll wear di'monds!"

Annie thought of the man who had tried to "pick her up" on the street, and had used much the same expression. She felt suddenly weary and sick and frightened at everything. She wanted to get away. She *must* get away, and home.

"Fred" took a firmer grip on her arm and hurrying up to the others announced, "Little Killjoy's all right now; she's goin' to stick to Freddie. Come on, let's have another sip of 'suds.' Home'll take care of itself."

Annie was really terrified. Affecting to be jolly, laughing with the rest, she waited her chance, and when they turned into a café and "Fred" let go her arm for a moment, she got behind a pair of pleasure hunters who were too

leaden footed to get out of the way, flew round a corner and hid herself from her crowd.

Somehow she worked back along the garish street, hurrying across the open spaces, worming through the denser crowd, till she saw at last the comforting blue of a policeman's uniform, and asked about cars. Just ahead there — turn to the left — and she could take the "L" for a dime or the surface for a nickel, transferring at Something-or-other street.

It was half-past one when Annie got home. Her mother was walking the floor with distraction. But she was tearful and peevish, rather than angry, and so relieved at the return that she didn't scold as Annie feared. Though she rarely confided in her mother, Annie told of the Coney Island trip. She did not mention the episode at Settlement House. She could not have told *that* to any one.

For the rest of the night she lay awake, staring at her narrow strip of stars and trying to solve the old eternal problem of how to get her head above the ruck of things.

She was through with Settlement House. She was through with the cheap, coarse pleasures of her poor little pleasure-hungry factory friends. The only way out of her unrelieved round of toil was through more toil, she concluded. The only escape from the factory was to redouble her efforts at night school. No matter if it took her last ounce of nervous energy she would use it, gamble with her health and strength, and play to win. She must live in the future, not the present.

It was about this time that Annie learned through an experience of her beloved Aunt Margaret a hard and cruel truth. Aunt Moggie suddenly moved from the boarding house where she had lived so long — the room with the desk and typewriter that Annie had so loved to visit as a child — and took a cheaper lodging.

Annie finally dragged the reason from her. The concern that employed Margaret Baily changed hands and the new

people, putting the office on a "strict efficiency basis" decided a younger woman would do better in her place.

The thought of age in connection with Aunt Moggie had never crossed Annie's mind. She didn't even now know how to figure it. Unmarriedness represented youth to Annie, just as "office work" stood for prosperity, just as goodness and beauty were linked. Could Aunt Moggie be — old? How old? Past fifty? Was fifty too old to be useful in an office? As far back as Annie could remember her aunt had held that same position. No wonder the uprooting process was cruel. How cruel it was Annie began to realize when for the first time she noticed there were streaks of silver in Aunt Moggie's dark hair. Her face, too, always so young and beautiful to Annie, seemed suddenly different. It gave Annie a horrid sensation, as if her aunt had suddenly changed into some one else. Annie felt bewildered and resentful about it all.

Weeks went by before another position could be found. And then the pay was less. The burden of the family now rested almost entirely upon Annie's slim shoulders.

Fortunately the busy season was on at the factory. There was plenty of overtime work, and undertime, too. Grimly setting aside all other purposes but work, Annie rose in the chill spring dawn, moving softly about the room for her dressing and her meager breakfast of coffee and bread, and reached the factory at seven.

With this extra hour and an evening or two a week she added two or three dollars to her wages of twelve. Every night she was not at the shop she went to the shorthand school. Annie's whole being was soon concentrated upon just one thing — *to keep awake*; not to succumb to the deadly craving for sleep and rest that was forever scourging her.

When at last she fell into bed at night she feared not waking in time. Despite her tiredness she slept fitfully and woke with dulled spirit and frazzled nerves. One day

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the foreman found some slips of paper covered with short-hand characters on her sewing machine.

"So here is why you don't keep your mind on your work, my fine lady-aristocrat!" he sneered, flinging the papers into the waste barrel. "Shop work, already, is not good enough for you, hey?"

And at the night class her teacher would say: "You'll never get your diploma if you don't concentrate on these word signs, Miss Hargan. I'm afraid you're not earnest enough in your wish to master high-class work. Your mind's in the factory."

"If I can just hold on until June!" Annie would tell herself, trying to shut out the discouragements that beset her. "Just till June!"

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## CHAPTER XIV

### HOLOCAUST!

**I**T was Saturday afternoon at the factory. There being no night school Saturdays, Annie was going to work overtime at the shop. It was hot and stuffy, and she had been working poorly. There had been newcomers taken in to fill the places of a number of Jewish girls who, led by "The Firebrand," had joined a union and were on strike for a Saturday half holiday.

The new girls were Italians, who spoke little English and knew nothing of unions. They were "green hands." Annie had often to stop and help them when their stitching went wrong — as Yetta Kaplin had once so gladly helped her.

About the middle of the afternoon she risked the foreman's displeasure to get a drink from the tin cooler behind the partition. Annie stood sipping the cold water and watching the new girls as they bent earnestly to their machines, their whole meager minds on their task. Behind them every now and then came the foreman, urging them to hurry or grudgingly helping when something ran askew. They were even more helpless, more poorly equipped for the life struggle than herself, Annie mused. Poor, driven things, unaccustomed to the new land, ignorant of their rights — and their wrongs.

Something recalled to her mind the locked door to the fire escape, and the other locked door which was never opened at all except when they worked late at night and the main entrance was closed. She put down the cup, glanced toward that door, catching her breath —

A thin scribble of bluish smoke seeped from under it. From a crack beneath the wooden shelves holding bolts of



The door to the fire escape was locked.

lawn, rose another filament of smoke. She stared, unable to realize the dread thing it portended — the thing she had thought of, but only as a remote threat, like the ever-stirring fires of volcanoes at the foot of which people build homes.

Even while she looked, spellbound, the space behind the partition grew hazy. There was a faint smell of smoke in the hot air. A little tongue of flame, yellowy-orange, and almost playful-looking shot from the baseboard and vanished again. It struck light into her befogged brain. In one galvanizing instant she realized the building was afire. The very boards beneath her feet were warm.

With a scream she flew round the partition, only to bump into the floor manager, who was coming to rebuke her for not being at work. He stopped, staring, then turned and rushed back into the workroom, waving his thick arms.

"Fire! Fire!" he cried hoarsely. "FIRE!"

With one wild movement, a hundred and fifty girls leaped from their machines and dashed for the door.

Screaming, with arms outstretched and eyes staring, they pushed, jamming in one mass at the exit, Annie in the midst of them, gasping. Those in front pounded with maddened fists upon the elevator door. Those in the middle cried out that they were suffocating and fought wildly to get loose from the press.

Some one shrieked "Go to the fire escape!" and a score of those at the back hurled themselves in its direction, catching their feet in the masses of white goods from the machines.

*The door to the fire escape was locked.* The room was now filled with smoke. Somebody seized a chair and smashed the windows one after another, the crash adding to the terror of the trapped. Shrieks, wails, curses cut through the thickened air. Flames leaped toward the center of the room, the burned partition falling with a crash. Tongues of red and orange licked up the scraps of fabric that swirled in the draught as the fire advanced.

Annie fought to keep her reason. Suddenly the elevator door opened before her and a solid block of human beings jammed into the cage, Annie among them. The terrified elevator runner bellowed, "There ain't no more room! Keep back!" The car slowly sank.

A mass of screaming girls pressed upon Annie so that she could scarcely keep her senses. A heavy thud sounded just above her head rousing her to sharpened consciousness. Then another — still another. A girl's hand and arm came through the grillwork on top of the car. They were jumping down the elevator shaft, striking dully one on another, as Annie, released at last with the others, ran shrieking into the street — into pandemonium. But she had escaped from the fate that seemed inevitable. She was alive! She was breathing free air again. Her bruised body was capable of movement. Her face was scratched and daubed with soot, her hair half down, her clothing torn, but the miracle had happened; she lived and was unhurt.

She stumbled over a hose that snaked along the wet pavement, freed herself, pushed blindly on and was stopped against a knot of shouting, sweating firemen who were trying to get a ladder up the side of the building to the red hell that raged above.

Pushed from every side, slipping and righting herself, she tried to force her way through the chaos that reigned all about. A deafening shout made her look upward. There on the stone coping nine stories aloft was a blackened something, wavering at the edge, arms above head.

Men roared. The firemen rushed to spread nets. Nothing availed. Down the Thing hurtled. Annie turned sick and dropped to her knees. There was an appalling thud. Another — and another. She buried her face in her hands and moaned. Some one stumbled over her, lifted and flung her out of the path. Blindly she struggled to her feet and lunged along. As she pressed her way around the corner of the building one of the Awful Things from above grazed

her by inches and crashed through the glass-and-concrete sidewalk.

Annie never knew how she reached home or what happened when she got there. For hours her mind was blank. She lay face downward on her cot, her mother hovering terrified at her side. Aunt Margaret came. Dr. Kelley came. And after a while she got partial control over her rent nerves and bludgeoned senses.

She lay for a time too shattered to take up the round of life. With her reserve already drained by day and night toil, she offered poor resistance to this shock. By day she thought of those girls — those girls. At night dread pictures passed before her tortured mind. Those girls — her friends, flesh-and-blood creatures like herself, working to live and that others might live — what were they now? Where were Yetta Kaplin and Mary and Sadie, with whom she had gone to Coney Island, and Rachel and Angelina, the little Italian with the big eyes, whom Annie had helped so often to untangle her thread? Had they escaped?

Goaded by the longing to know, Annie dragged herself up and tried to go through the motions of everyday existence. Her mother and Aunt Margaret hid the newspapers. But Annie got some for herself and read of the red horror she had passed through.

More than one hundred of them! She read how they had been found in frightful heaps against the locked doors of the death trap. She read of the wild sorrow of the East Side. And of the long, awful funerals.

Yetta — had jumped. Annie closed her eyes. It did no good. She could not shut out the picture. It sometimes seemed as if she never would be able to. Or pass the corner where the shop had been.

She thought of the men who were responsible for the horror, and almost found pity for them. What remorse must they be going through!

Then, just two weeks later, Annie read that they had set up business again a few blocks from the old place, with the same line of waists, the same scale of output! Could it be true, she marveled? Were other girls sitting before other machines stitching sleeves and hemming blouses for the Circle Company, just as before?

Annie recalled the incident of long ago — the stolen baby carriage — and of her pained disillusion that such baseness could exist! But this new thing — what might not happen now?

Two months elapsed before Annie heard of the two partners again. They were to be brought into court, she read, on criminal charges. She had a little feeling of triumph. The law would not permit such wrong to go unpunished! She followed the accounts of the trial with keenest interest.

One or two of the surviving girls testified against the men as to the locked doors. Their testimony was rebutted by a foreman, a relative of the defendants. He swore the door was open. A simple-minded youth employed as messenger also asserted the door was unlocked, notwithstanding that the door itself, *burned through* from the inside, was brought into court, a silent witness to the contrary.

Annie was aghast when the partners were acquitted and went back to their shop and their profits. A few weeks later the newspapers told how a building inspector found a locked door to a fire escape in their new shop. For this violation a *twenty-dollar* fine was imposed. Outraged and baffled, Annie puzzled over it all.

She went to a memorial meeting held at a large hall. Prominent speakers and women of wealth were upon the platform. With tears in their voices they recalled the heartrending features of the great fire. In eloquent words they expressed sympathy and regret. They even subscribed to a relief fund.

In the midst of these addresses a small, plainly clad work-

ing girl stepped to the platform and faced the vast audience. With a thrill, Annie recognized her old friend, "The Firebrand." With a newly acquired manner of calm repression she spoke. Annie leaned forward to catch her words.

"Yes, it is very kind of you people," she was saying, her voice gathering strength as she went on, "to join this assemblage where great ones have spoken. You have expressed grief.

"But I know what the grief of you good people means!" The girl's tone was clear and ringing now, and the audience listened more attentively. "To-morrow you will forget the dead girls whose lives paid for the miserable scraps of cloth that were saved by the locking of the doors!

"Before the fire some of us came to you who sit here tonight, and others like you, and told you we were working in a firetrap, selling our health and our strength for wages that hardly kept body and soul together. We told you our working conditions were unbearable, that we were driven like slaves, that we weren't even allowed a half holiday, that it was just one grind of work, work, work.

"And what did *you* say?" The girl bent forward, searching the faces before her with her great dark eyes. "You told us to keep the peace, to be law abiding, not to resort to violence! You told us not to strike, but to be good and work harder, and trust to the fairness of our employers to adjust our grievances! That's what you told us, my good, sympathetic people!

"It is only when those charred bodies lie in heaps that you come in your beautiful clothes and cry and tell how sorry you are. *Are you sorry enough to help us put an end to such wrongs?* . . . I tell you if we working girls are to get even the simplest human rights we must get them without you. Yes—in spite of you! That's all I've got to say."

Amid absolute silence "The Firebrand" sat down.

Annie read about it all in the papers next day. The fac-

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tory girl was quoted at length under flaring headlines. Scant space was accorded the other speakers. Annie felt that the public far and wide would be electrified, as she had been, over the girl's courageous truths. And that reforms of every sort would be inaugurated at once in the industrial world.

Long afterward she read that out of the hundred-odd bereaved families whose girls, many of whom were the sole support of households, had been lost in the fire, only three brought suit against the men who were to blame. A verdict for damages of \$75 was rendered by the judge in the first case as being adequate for the life snuffed out. Something hardened in Annie's soul as she read it.

"Whatever happens," she told herself, "I must keep my little sister from the shops. I must and will earn enough for us all till the children can make their livings decently and without risking their lives."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CHASM BRIDGED

AUNT MARGARET, spending almost every leisure hour at the Hargans' and watching her niece closely in the days following the fire, saw her broken condition. It was plain from the nerve-quiver that came at the slamming of a door, the undefined fear in her eyes, her trembling hands, that she was unable to carry the burden of the family. She saw Annie was trying frantically to control her palsied faculties, to clear her mind and gird her body for fight.

The heart of Aunt Moggie ached to see her being ground between the millstones of implacable necessity for earning, and the inability to stretch her meager equipment to the earning point. When Annie came home night after night and tossed her frayed little list of "Help Wanted" advertisements discouragedly onto the table, the older woman knew what despair was behind the twisted smile, the misted eyes, the effort to choke down food.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Aunt Moggie," whispered Annie one evening after supper. "I've been to thirteen places to-day!"

"They won't give me work because I haven't experience. And I can't get experience if they won't give me work!"

"I walked in Wall Street and saw hundreds of girls with jobs. How did they get the *first one*? How does a girl *begin*? And those well-dressed men — who look as though they'd never been hungry in their lives — going in and out of their offices, talking and laughing! I felt like going up to one of them and screaming, 'Mister — you've got everything and I've got nothing; give me work!' There

must be something I can do; only give me *a chance*, only let me *in!*"

Into Margaret Bailly's mind a sudden idea seemed to come.

"Listen, Nancie," she said, the color coming into her grave, sweet face, "I have a plan. It's for us all.

"But promise me you'll do your share of it just as I say — without an argument."

"It's some new sacrifice, dear — I see it coming," said Annie warily, her cheek against her aunt's. "You've done enough already. You're keeping things going for us as it is." Annie caught her lip between her teeth. She didn't dare trust herself to say more.

Her old conception of Aunt Moggie as the personification of opulence and independence had faded along with other childhood illusions. She was still a dispenser of gifts, an angel of goodness. But in place of the enviable goddess of freedom was a lonely, self-sacrificing woman, the love of whose heart and the work of whose hands was poured out for another's home, another's children.

"Promise," the older woman was saying with gentle command. "Promise me, Nancie. When you were little you always did as I told you."

Annie nodded uneasily, saying nothing.

"Well, you're going for two — whole — fat — weeks — into the country," went on her aunt, making emphatic pauses between words, "to a farm I know. And I'm — coming here — to borrow your little bed — and look after things — till you come bouncing home with your cheeks puffed out and your eyes bright — all ready to — *take that job in an office!*"

"Aunt Mog!" Annie came quickly round in front of her, holding her by the elbows at arm's length. "You know I can't do it! You sha'n't —"

"But you promised. You know we believe in keeping promises," Aunt Margaret cut in. "Now make your old

auntie happy, dear! It'll save me money coming here."

In her unsteady and bewildered state Annie could not protest long or very firmly. She seemed unable to think things out. The only way, as usual, was to trust Aunt Moggie and let her "take care" of her as in the old days crossing Union Square.

Going to the New Jersey farm was the biggest travel event in the Hargan family annals. Every one contributed to getting Nancie ready. Even small Jim-brother, without bawling, gave up his windsor tie to add a touch to the cheap little traveling dress Mrs. Hargan and her sister made with a superhuman effort in two evenings. Janie got out her only treasure, a plated gold locket on a grimy ribbon. Mrs. Hargan found two new handkerchiefs some one had given her Christmas.

Annie felt like an automaton going through tricks. Somehow she got ready. Somehow a bag was borrowed and packed. Somehow Saturday afternoon came and with it Aunt Moggie from the office, the train selected and the ticket bought. Somehow Annie found herself on the red plush seat of the car, the rusty bag beside her, and a blurred vision of her aunt smiling and waving outside the window as the train slid out. Somehow she found Mrs. Nevis, the farmer's wife, at the station and jounced beside her in the ancient buggy to the house on the hilltop where rest and restoration were supposed to wait.

This expectation would probably have been fulfilled if Annie and country life had been even casual acquaintances. But in all her seventeen and a half years she had never known more than a day's trip on an excursion boat, crowded and noisy, or a Sunday's visit with her father to Highbridge. This vast openness of landscape, these silent woods and hills, already gave her a sense of loss and loneliness.

The farmer folk were kind. But when supper was over and old man Nevis was reading by the kitchen lamp, while his wife did the dishes, Annie felt like a solitary traveler

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in a far, strange land. Merely having nothing to do made her uneasy. And with nothing familiar around her, her thoughts refused to concentrate, she got more and more adrift.

She offered to help Mrs. Nevis with the dishes.

"No, indeed, child," said that lady briskly, "you're not to do a thing but rest up. Why don't you take a good run round the kitchen garden with Rover and then go straight to bed? Sleep'll do you more good than anything else. Country air makes most folks sleepy till they get used to it."

But Annie didn't feel sleepy. The unbroken darkness outside oppressed and frightened her. She started at the slight sounds of the spring night — the wind round the house, the soft crash of tossing branches, the barking of the dog, the cheeping of little wood-creatures, a distant bell whose voice was sad.

Upstairs in her room everything was so neat that it seemed sacrilege to "live there." When she got into the wide, billowy bed she felt a complete stranger even to herself. Then came the familiar smell of the kerosene lamp, just blown out! It made her lonesomer than ever.

She closed her eyes and saw a vision of home — the untidy supper table with the lamp in the middle, and spots on the red, checkered cloth where little Jim had slopped his soup. The hot, cluttered room with her cot in the corner, and Janie snuffling with a cold as she bent over her geography lesson, the book propped on her plaid lap. The disordered kitchen, odorous of tea and cabbage. Her mother, tiredly washing the dishes and Aunt Moggie in her tailored skirt and blouse, with the faded checked apron tied on, drying them. In the surge of homesickness that engulfed her, how dear it all seemed! And how far, far away.

The bed was near enough the window for Annie's eyes, as at home, to look straight up into the blue-black sky. This at least was the same. The same winking stars, only

more of them. Annie kept her gaze on the friendly stars, wondering if the folks at home were talking of her, thinking of Aunt Moggie staying there and sleeping in *her* cot, the nice room at the lodging house given up.

At last she fell asleep. But it was never easy to fall asleep. The days, too, were lonesome and long and empty, and when Annie had been at the Nevis farm a week it seemed a month to her.

In the tenement room at home Aunt Margaret was lying awake, thinking of Annie. If it had been her habit to think of herself, she would have had plenty of material to turn over in her mind. For many years her world had been a small but adequate room in a good house, her daily trip in her neat clothes to her neat office desk, her work well performed and her wage her own.

Like most spinsters, she had arranged her life with nice orderliness. If she lacked colorful interests, she at least possessed the negative blessings of tranquillity and seclusion.

But now her path was roughened. Hers no longer the quiet room at the end of the day, the unbroken rest, the serene departure for office and work. Her world was disorganized. There wasn't a corner for privacy in the Hargan flat. Nor a closet or drawer she could call her own. Her fresh collars and cuffs were forever getting mixed up with Janie's tumbled hair ribbons. Her brush and comb were usually to be found on the shelf over the kitchen stove, or on a chair beside a half-eaten apple, or fallen into the coal scuttle. Her sleep was broken nightly by blubberings from little Jim for a "drink o' water."

There would be no new suit for Aunt Moggie this year. She washed her old one in soap bark and pressed it carefully. She had her shoes resoled, trimmed her last year's hat with a bit of ribbon and an ornament from the ten-cent store.

Annie noted these details when Aunt Moggie came out to spend Sunday with her after a week at the Nevis farm.

"But, darlin'," protested Aunt Margaret, "where are the roses in your cheeks? And why aren't you looking like a dumpling?"

Annie tried to laugh, but her aunt saw the quivering lip and chin.

"Oh, Aunt Mog — I just can't — can't *stand* it! I want to come home. I can't sleep nights thinking of you paying six dollars a week for me to stay idling here, not getting anywhere, not helping anybody. I won't be so useless. I'll be all right again if I can just go to work. Only —" the look of terror came into Annie's eyes again, "not a factory — not a factory, Aunt Moggie. I *couldn't*."

And so it came about that Margaret Baily did a thing she had never done before. She went to her boss at the office and talked with compelling firmness.

"You *must* find a place for my niece, Mr. Simms. It's life and death with us. She's nearly eighteen, an intelligent, ambitious girl. She had almost finished her course at the stenographic school when the Circle Waist Company fire — Ah, you know about it! Well, Annie's been upset since. But she's all right now — that is, she will be if she can get work. Make a place for her here. I'll help her with her shorthand speed."

Simms was a humane and reasonable man. He was kind to his wife and children. He subscribed to charities. But he was a business man. His line was druggists' supplies, not philanthropy. Other manufacturers were cutting prices. Simms had to. In order to make his business "pay," he hired help at the lowest possible wage. Competition to Simms was "the life of trade." He never saw it as the death of those who made it possible to maintain his trade. He looked shrewdly at Miss Baily.

"We could use a smart girl to work the switchboard, copy letters and make herself generally useful," he said. "But if she's had no experience in office work and can't take fast dictation we couldn't go above six dollars to start."

Six dollars! Margaret Bailly stared back at Mr. Simms, not knowing that she looked at him. She was thinking how Annie could keep up the household on six dollars a week! She was thinking of Annie's sinking heart to hear she could not earn but *six dollars* in the world of business of which she had dreamed so long!

She moistened her dry lips and said:

"She'll get more if she's satisfactory?"

"Sure," said Simms, anxious to end the interview. "I'll tell the cashier to put her name on the roll. Have her here Monday."

"Er — Mr. Simms?"

He looked up a trifle impatiently.

"I — I would like to arrange to have the cashier put in two extra dollars — out of my salary each week for a while — if you wouldn't mind? I —" she laughed nervously, groping for a diplomatic phrase. Simms looked sheepish, but was not inclined to enrich his offer.

"All right, Miss Bailly; it's your affair," he said, and turned back to his desk.

Annie came home the following Saturday. Her eyes danced for the first time in weeks when her aunt told her the news.

"How perfectly, wonderfully, gorgeously elegant!" she cried, hugging Aunt Moggie, hugging her mother, hugging Janie and Jim-boy and trying to hide in his neck the tears that her unstrung nerves couldn't seem to control these days. "Eight dollars — and only from nine to half-past five! Oh, Aunt Mog, you're a fairy god-aunt!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### OUT OF THE DARK

**A**S Annie started out on Monday morning to her job *in an office* she felt reborn. She bought her pink ticket for the Third Avenue "L" with a novel sense of opulence, flinging a happy smile at the gray old man who sold it.

On the way down to Fulton Street, where the establishment of Simms & Orcutt was located, Annie glimpsed a factory room or two. Through open windows she saw the bent heads of girls at work. Already they seemed of another world. Already she pitied them. Before them lay nothing but toil, underpaid and monotonous. Before *her* stretched Opportunity, where she might soar to unguessed heights!

The offices of Simms & Orcutt were in a fairly modern building. To Annie it seemed palatial. The coolness and cleanliness of it! The fascination of the news and candy stand laden with bright-hued temptations near the elevators! The thrill of stepping out from the elevator into a marble corridor instead of a stuffy room full of whirring sewing machines!

She had to hunt a little to find the right door. But there was no hurry. It was not quite nine, the time she was required to come. The luxury of it. Already the shirtwaist stitchers had been at work an hour!

She found the door: "Simms & Orcutt, Chemicals and Essential Oils." Annie liked "essential oils," whatever they were. They sounded so important and necessary! She opened the door, half timidly, half triumphantly, and found herself in a commonplace outer office with a high

desk where the bookkeeper worked, and several smaller ones for the women clerks. With a little thrill Annie recognized the sort of desk her Aunt Moggie used to have in her room — with the typewriter that disappeared down into it when you shut the lid.

Only a half-grown boy was there.

"Whojer wanna see?" he asked, laconic but friendly, his jaws pausing an instant in their chewing-gum allegro. "Oh, yeah, you're the new goil. Well, hang up yer things and then I'll learn you the switchboard. Know anything about telefoming?"

Annie didn't. But she knew how to smile. And somehow she and the boy got on well from that moment. Annie liked him. And the telephone. And the desks and the typewriters — everything. Her fingers itched to get at one of them. Had she forgotten how to click the shiny keys?

By the time she was duly planted at the switchboard the office folks arrived — some stenographers, a young man or two and — Aunt Moggie!

It seemed strange to see Aunt Moggie in this familiar world of hers, which was yet so unfamiliar to the Hargans. It was almost like getting behind the scenes in a theater, Annie felt. She was so elated herself that she didn't understand how these people could take it all so matter-of-factly. Perhaps they had been born in this world. Perhaps they had not known the task and the triumph of crossing the chasm!

The work that lay this side the chasm was puzzling enough Annie found before the day was over. But how infinitely less racking than the factory! The learning of the "telefome" was a harsh test of her nerves. But the boy (who was called "Chet"—Annie wondered what it stood for) helped her good naturedly and straightened her out when she got the cords plugged in wrong and "cut off" Mr. Simms in the middle of a tirade on the price of sal-ammoniac.



"Oh, yeah, you're the new goil. Well, hang up yer things  
and then I'll learn you the switchboard."

She was tired, but the day ended at 5:30, which seemed to Annie the middle of the afternoon. Aunt Margaret went home with her for supper and to carry some odds and ends of her belongings to her new, cheap furnished room.

"Well, dearie, how did it go?"

"Oh, wonderful, Aunt Mog! I'll be friends with that terrible telephone in no time. And the bookkeeper's promised to let me address envelopes on the typewriter to-morrow. Soon I'll be making out bills—he said so. And then—stenography!"

After supper they practiced with the stenography. Aunt Margaret drilled Annie in the chemical terms used at the office and dictated some imaginary letters. It was slow, of course, but she was surprised how well Annie did it, all things considered.

"She'll get on," Margaret told Mrs. Hargan later; "she's twice as bright as I was at her age. In a year she'll be earning as much as she got at the factory—maybe more."

"I hope so," said Annie's mother; "eight dollars is terrible little to get along on, with things getting higher all the time. We're an awful burden on *you*, Margaret. I wish I could get strong again—or else die."

"Sh, Jennie, don't talk like that! Things are going to be better now. You'll see."

And she did see. Annie gathered strength, body and soul. Her appetite for work was avid. Like a flame, it licked up every scrap that came in its way. She mastered the "terrible telephone." She won the old bookkeeper with her neat if slow typewriting, the rarity of her mistakes, her unfailing willingness to take on any task.

Her shorthand was painfully laggard. The difficult words were stumbling blocks, but Aunt Moggie found a simple chemistry book, and after supper, night after night, she and Annie studied and drilled. Sometimes Annie worked alone, for her aunt got copying to do at home whenever she could to eke out the general expense fund.

Annie's old longings for pleasure were more or less absorbed in her passion to learn and to be successful in her new work. A sense of the girl's effort penetrated even the trade-hardened shell of old Simms. He found her useful. For all his absorption in business he managed to note her wholesome looks and manner, her modest dress, her devotion to duty without apparent excursions into flirtations and frivolities.

When Annie had been there two months he summoned Margaret Bailly to his private office.

"That niece of yours is a good girl," he announced tersely. "I've had her pay raised to eight dollars, so that two you've been taking off your wages and sticking onto hers is yours again. Now please take this letter to Haynes & Hawkins, Albany."

Thus Annie never knew when her first raise came. She only noted that Aunt Moggie bought shoes for Jimsie that week and sent a big bag of flour round from the grocer's. When Annie protested that it was too much, she said she had earned a lot extra from her typing.

At the end of six months she got another raise. There was ten dollars in her envelope. She looked down at it with a happy smile, recalling that other time when she had first earned ten dollars for a week of work. How different her work now! In her buoyancy there was almost a feeling of guilt. To get so much money for doing what was a joy and a delight! She was emerging! Getting her head at last a little above the ruck of things!

"Oh, mother! mother!" she shouted, bursting into the Hargan kitchen that night, waving her ten-dollar bill. "I'm a *human being*, dear! Not a machine any longer, not just a cog in a wheel to be driven and driven!"

Aunt Margaret had a windfall that week, too. An author gave her a manuscript to type. It meant a little financial margin for them all. To celebrate the new glory and the promise that sang in her heart of even better success to come,

Annie dared buy herself a blouse. A filmy, fussy, pretty thing, prettier than any she had stitched in her factory days.

Regarding it in its noble pasteboard box, all daintied up with pink tissue paper, Annie thought suddenly of Miss Wells and Settlement House — and the mortifying memory of her wild dream there. Little shadowy longings began to creep out like ghosts. Work wasn't everything —

She shut the waist in its box and shoved it under her bed. She wore it to the office Saturday. All the girls "dressed up" a little then and most of them had engagements for the half holiday. It was a bright warm September day. Simms had actually stayed at home for an elderly gentlemanly game of golf, and the office relaxed a bit.

The telephone burred, and when Annie stuck the plug in (she never got them twisted any more) and listened, a youthful, feminine voice asked, "Is Mr. Brady there?"

"Mr. Brady?" puzzled Annie, a crease between her eyebrows. "Are you sure he's with this office — Simms & Orcutt."

"Oh, yes!" came the answer. "Mr. Chester Brady — 'Chet.'"

Annie laughed outright. "Chet," the office factotum! To think of sixteen-year-old "Chet" being "Mister Brady" to somebody!

Mr. Chester Brady was duly called and asked his fair friend to "hold the wire." With dignity he strode into Simms's private room to an accompaniment of clerkly titters.

So even Chet had a "date" for the afternoon, mused Annie wistfully, as the girls began to close their desks and prink before the office mirror. She had some work to finish, and was still tapping the typewriter when a voice beside her made her look up.

"Shouldn't work after whistle blows; you'll be put out of the union!"

It was a good-natured youth, Bernard Carroll, who was

employed in the order department, and had often exchanged pleasantries with Annie. "Bernie" was a dapper young person to whom every new face in the office was an adventure.

"Didn't expect to be caught by a walking delegate," Annie smiled, clicking off the finishing words of her letter. She knew this belated mark of Mr. Carroll's esteem was because of her new blouse.

"Speaking of walking," pursued Bernie, "why don't we move on out of here and walk to the Staten Island ferry? It's a nice sail on a day like this."

"All right," said Annie, with a little surge of gladness. "Why don't we?" It was good not to be left entirely out of things.

Annie's spirits rose as they walked down Broadway in the half-holiday crowd. Young Carroll was easy to talk to; he did most of the talking himself. As they passed Wall Street he gazed down its crooked canyon with an admiring eye.

"Ha — *that's* the street!" he cried. "There's where the dough is! Just you keep an eye on little Bernie and you'll see him dodging down there one of these days in his automobile to keep a date with a millionaire!"

"Is it so easy to get rich?" asked Annie.

"Well — you got to get in with the right crowd," conceded Bernie.

When they were on the boat, well forward to get the cool bay breeze, Bernie talked some more. He told how he and his "crowd" sometimes picked up stray tips and took "flyers."

"Why, I couldn't make out on only my salary," said Bernie. "I've got \$20 a year to pay in boat club dues alone!"

Annie was even more interested in the boat club than in high finance. And as Bernie would rather hold forth on those subjects than anything else, and could not always get

so eager a listener, the two were soon getting on swimmingly.

"There's a dance on at the club this very night," he presently remembered. "Come on—go! You'll have a crackerjack time."

Annie thrilled at the thought. But clothes — She was sure she hadn't "the right clothes."

"Shucks! Wear what you got on. You look fine in that. Nobody fusses up."

The Waterwitch Boat Club on the Harlem River was the portal of a new world to Annie. The fresh air and decent surroundings, the wholesome boys and girls she met — Oh, how different, how blessedly different from Fidelbaum's Dancing Academy on East Broadway! How much nicer and more fun than Miss Wells's Settlement House! Annie beamed and basked and blossomed out in the first real gayety she had ever known.

She thought of the girls she had gone to Coney Island with that time, and the horrid youths in the party. And of their rowdy pleasures. Why didn't they, too, free themselves from that life — cross the chasm from factory to office, from East Side dance hall to West Side boatclub, no matter what the struggle to cross it cost! She had done it. They could do it — if they would renounce their cheap fun along with their cheap clothes, and knuckle down hard enough. Get "into the right crowd," as Bernie Carroll put it.

"You know," said Annie to Bernie as they were sitting out a dance on the gallery overhanging the lapping river, "I'd love to bring some one I know to this delicious place — a girl who works in a shop. She stitches shirtwaists all day from eight to six, and never has any decent fun."

"Oh, Lord, no! We don't want factory girls. They'd be awfully out of place, really. And besides, they wouldn't care for it. Don't go getting this idea of uplifting the

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downtrodden factory girl into your head. It doesn't pay. If they wanted anything different, they'd have it. You can get anything if you go after it right. Come on, here's our one-step."

## CHAPTER XVII

### YOUTH COMES INTO ITS OWN

DURING her one-step Annie kept up enough small talk to hold the boy's interest. Instinctively she knew that the one deadly sin in a crowd of summertime young folks was "getting serious" or "being highbrow." But underneath the light personalities that threaded their patter was a sense of distinct shock. Annie had supposed he would be as keen as she to have her friend from the shop see the boat club and enjoy its pleasures. She felt Bernie's opinion to be wrong about factory girls not appreciating what he called "the uplift." She felt resentful at his not wanting that sort of girl at the boat club dances.

Yet she was too deeply under the spell of her unaccustomed good time to risk discussing it further. She dared not tell him she was a factory girl graduated but recently from the loft and the sewing machine.

Between remarks to Bernie she glanced about the big unplastered room. She absorbed its details quickly — the crossed oars and gay pennants on the varnished walls, the sleek piano and its player, the neat refreshment table, the easy-mannered young people dressed mostly in white, the sun-reddened faces and hands of the boys fresh from a half day on the water, the ripples of laughter and the sallies of the acknowledged "cut-ups."

She longed to learn how it was all done — how one grew to be a part of this world and accept its offerings as a matter of course. Later Bernie took her down into the boathouse where the skiffs and shells were stored, explaining proudly, while Annie admired. The boats naturally suggested a row. Would she care to go? Would she — well, she should just say so! The boy unmoored a shiny St.

Lawrence skiff and presently Annie was stowed upon cushions and squealing delightedly as Bernie stepped tippily into it and shoved off.

The river was a setting in fairyland. The moon, the shore lights and boat lights, and the voices of singers who passed merrily in other skiffs, turned the night from a thing of oppression as it had been in the country into a living, jeweled glory.

Annie would have preferred to be silent and enjoy in her own way the soft air, the sound of slapping wavelets against the boat, the lights on the river's rim and on the great bridge to the north, the tinkle of music from the boathouses as they glided through paths of orange glowing from their open doorways. She could have shed tears of joy over it all. But she had noticed that "popular" girls talked and were lively.

To offset this handicap, Annie made a special effort to be entertaining. She found it easier than she thought, far easier than it had been to interest the coarse youths of the Coney Island jaunt, or Irv' Callberg at Fidelbaum's Academy.

She started by admiring Bernie's stroke at the oars. He was fond of athletics in a small way and proud of what prowess he possessed. He immediately cataloged Annie as a girl who appreciated a fellow, and repaid her by saying how pretty she looked in that frilly blouse with the moonlight on her hair. Annie was too happy for words — yet she found words easily.

Before the evening was over she learned that the cardinal principle of interesting these young men that she truly cared to interest was never for an instant to relax her show of good nature; to be fearless, whether in trying a new dance step or canoeing through the wash of a steamer; and to say the things that made them feel what splendid fellows they were.

When they got back to the boathouse Bernie ran the skiff

in through the narrow opening with fair skill. Annie thrilled again at his capable muscles. And when he helped her out onto the narrow footway he gave her arm a little squeeze that sent a pleasant ripple through her.

Thus Annie's introduction to a social life many degrees better than any she had yet known was at least fairly triumphant. The worse feature was the "seeing home." She hated to have young Mr. Carroll know the decrepitude of the tenement where she lived. During the trip down on the Third Avenue Elevated she therefore redoubled her efforts to shine and make him shine. She succeeded so well that Bernie obviously impressed both with her success as a boat club comrade and her charm as a girl, was soon telling her his plans and ambitions.

"I been with old Simms over a year now," he said, crossing his knees and leaning toward Annie confidentially. "I'll be twenty-one in January and I ought to know pretty much about the business by then. Simms said he'd gimme a raise on my twenty-first birthday if I kept on making good. Simms is a real decent old guy, you know. Well, if he does, I can see myself making quite a little bit here and there in chemical stocks. It's all in getting in with the right people."

"I was lucky, wasn't I, having my aunt at Simms & Orcutt's?" smiled Annie. "She got me in."

"Yeah, she's all right, your aunt. The only thing about her is she ain't spunky enough. She don't blow her own horn. She's too quiet. She'll never get rich. You got to do more than just work in this world. You gotta push yourself."

"I had a raise," essayed Annie to fill a slight pause. "I get ten now. Do you s'pose I ever dare hope for another one?" The thought flashed through her of how she should ever meet the family budget and still find money for even the simplest items of dress in case Bernard should ask her again to the boat club.

"Sure, you'll get another one"; the boy's tone was confident. "I heard Simms tell the bookkeeper only the other day you had more gumption than any two of the other stenogs put together. Sure, you'll get more," he repeated, "if you speak up once in a while and let him know you're living. Why, when I first went there—" And Bernie talked on contentedly, describing his advance from humble boy-of-all-work to the post he now held.

"I don't mean to say I'm anything wonderful," he continued. "I don't pretend to be a specialist in the chemical trade. And I don't suppose the business'd go to pot if I left. But I can see myself cleaning up my thousand a year before I been there much longer. And when I'm gray-headed I see a photograph of Bernard Carroll, Esquire, grabbing in a neat income of four or five thou' easy. Then it's me for a nice house out in Jersey, and a chance to enjoy life."

He paused, swinging his foot and spinning his neat straw hat between his thumbs and fingers. Annie said "Fine!" with just the right degree both of admiration and taken for grantedness in her tone.

"Oh! here's my station — *already!*" She emphasized the "already" enough for Bernie to feel he had been a pleasant companion without committing herself to too marked admiration. Annie was learning fast.

As they walked east through the block where the Hargans lived, Annie was afraid her escort would sniff at the disheartening surroundings. To her relief he seemed to take no notice. She slowed down — they were getting near to her door. He lingered a minute, looking at Annie, not the dismal tenements, the cheap saloon near by, the barrels that still remained, redolent of such poor scraps as even Poverty had discarded. She sensed admiration in his gaze and felt elated.

"I've had the loveliest time," she smiled.

"That's good; we'll go again," answered Carroll.

From an open window near them came the sudden cry of a baby and immediately its mother's soothing: "There, there — sh — sh —" and a fragment of crooning song. Annie wished he'd say good-night and go now, before the neighbor with the wakeful baby put her head out the window and bid them do their "gabbing somewhere else." A marauding cat scrambled upon a laden barrel and began to sniff the rubbish. Another cat yowled.

"Whereabouts do you live, Mr. Carroll?" Annie asked the question partly to distract him from the squalor about them, partly as a remote reminder that he had still a journey to make.

"Oh, I live up a ways on the west side — it's worse than this," he added good humoredly. "But it don't bother me. It ain't where you start from that counts; it's where you end up! Well, I guess I won't keep you any longer. Glad you enjoyed it. Good-night — see you to-morrer."

"Good-night," said Annie, "and thanks."

She liked him the better for that last bit of philosophy. She guessed he had said it to make her feel more comfortable. She slowly climbed the stairs, a warm feeling of gratitude round her heart. She had had a wonderful evening and there was much to think about.

She undressed quietly, unfastening the pretty blouse with careful fingers. She smiled as she saw how crushed it was from the dancing.

"He never noticed me till I had this," she said to herself, smoothing it over the back of a chair. "If he asks me again I'll have to wear something else."

She got into bed wondering how much enough white duck would cost to make a skirt, and how she could contrive a pair of shoes — thin, low ones, like the other girls wore. She hitched her pillow so as to see the widest possible strip of starry sky and lived over every detail of the boat club dance and the coming home. Now that she was home again



"Good night," said Annie, "and thanks."

in the shabby room, in her little cot, it almost seemed a dream.

How many times had she longed for something like this — a "fellow" who would like her and "take her places." And here had been the very fellow all these months right in the office! She had never thought of Bernard Carroll as attractive, though she had taken passing interest in his neat clothes, his busy air. Annie did not realize that any man becomes interesting to any woman as soon as he shows her marked attention.

She thought of Herbert Travis at the Settlement House, but the little pang that shot through her soon spent itself and a feeling of rightness came. If Travis was handsomer, richer, better dressed and better educated than Bernie, he was also further removed from her level. It would have been difficult if not impossible to "live up to" Travis. But Bernie was of her world, spoke her language, was not incongruous to build her thoughts around. Travis, Annie mused, belonged with her abstract wishes of long ago — the things she would have asked if a fairy with a magic wand were by. Bernie Carroll seemed the fulfillment of a more practical conception.

She fell asleep toward daylight, but got up cheerily when her mother shook her awake at 7. She hummed as she dressed, doing her hair, adjusting her belt and collar with extra care.

Going to business was now a daily adventure. There was a zest to everything. She worked harder and with deep enjoyment. She had drudged at the factory with only half her faculties, her mind dormant. Now she brought her native intelligence to bear on every piece of work that came to hand.

Her willingness to do more than she was paid for, to stay over hours if necessary, to shorten her lunchtime that something might be finished, her cheerful undertaking of tasks the others avoided, was not lost on old man Simms.

One day, to Annie's intense surprise, he summoned her instead of Margaret Bailly, to take some letters. Annie supposed her aunt was busy with other things, and set about to do her best with this new task. There was a style and crispness to her work, and when she turned in the stack of finished sheets, each with its envelope slipped over the top — no misspelled words, no erasures — the crusty old gentleman glanced over them, then at Annie and said:

"Put Chester on the switchboard and come in here this afternoon at 3 to take some more."

Then it was not that Aunt Moggie was too busy! It was the triumph of modern methods over the older-fashioned ones. The touch of youth and youth's briskness. How Aunt Margaret had worked to teach her, yet it was the novice, not the mentor, who reaped the reward! It saddened Annie and she knew it hurt her aunt.

But a while afterward, when Annie found twelve dollars in her pay envelope, Aunt Moggie kissed her and said, "Splendid, my darling — your old aunt's so proud of you! This is youth's day. I want you to get on and to be happy."

And Annie was happy. With the buoyancy of youth and youth's self-centerment she threw off the momentary sadness and rejoiced in all that was hers.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LIVING AT LAST

BERNARD CARROLL, and thought of him, began to fill Annie's life. Not because of any remarkable qualities he possessed. But rather because of his unremarkable ones. The easy levels of his mental processes made talking to him a comfortable task. He was merry-humored without demanding an incessant flow of wit from his companion. He was inclined to dressiness but Annie liked that, so long as he was not foppish. If he was a trifle egotistical, a bit cocksure of his ability to succeed in life and interest girls, Annie was ready to concede *that* as a normal accompaniment of worth. Above all, a certain kindness underlay all he did. He never made a joke at the expense of some one's feelings. Nor ridiculed old people for their crotchets and queernesses. Persons he didn't like he simply avoided and shut out from his ken by a shrug of indifference. He wouldn't have crossed the street to repay an injury. But he would walk humbly in the wake of any one he felt might further his ambitions in the smallest degree.

Bernie's origin was obscure. His father had been humbly connected with certain racing interests, and was now supposed to be deceased. Of a roving temperament, he had years before "gone West" and not returned. Bernie's mother died when he was born, leaving him to be reared by his grandmother, with whom he still lived. Grandma Carroll did a little cooking or cleaning for pay, but Bernie was the mainstay of his household, as Annie was of hers.

To earn money was the great necessity with both of them at this time. Annie's method and hope was the quieter one — the steady plug, plug of service, with a stern eye on out-

put and an unflagging effort to rise by making herself valuable.

Bernie wanted quicker action. He used to take her to the White Tile Dairy for lunch, and after their frugal one-piece meal, with occasionally a sweet added for dessert, he would put his elbows on the table and talk absorbedly of shares and market prices, of the chances for cleaning up on certain chemical stocks, as fellows he knew were always doing or hoping to do.

"I tell you any one who really wants to can get along in this world," he would say. "Why, all these rich guys were nothing but newsies or peddlers or office boys when they began. Look at Carnegie and Schwab and the whole pack of 'em. You'll see. Just keep your eye on me, Nan!" (It was "Nan" and "Bernie" with them now.)

Annie liked to hear him talk that way. It thrilled her almost as much as when in the old days her father used to tell her they'd be rich and travel, and live in a flat with all light rooms!

Gradually she veered round again to the old optimistic viewpoint. She began to believe Bernie was right; anybody could get on who was willing to make the effort. Still, fortune was slow in coming her way. She had now passed her eighteenth birthday, and while she was working with all her energy, her salary was only twelve a week. She began to count more and more on Bernie. All her social pleasures came through him. The delight she felt in her daily jaunt to business was because he was there. And unconsciously her future was tinged with a hope of which he was the center. He represented Fulfillment, Promise, Success.

There came to be a subcurrent of understanding between them. He went further than a merely proprietary air toward Annie. For one thing, she couldn't help noticing how terribly pleasant he was to Aunt Moggie in the office, loaning her his umbrella when sudden rain came up, helping her

on with her coat, bringing her little boxes of candy or a couple of oranges at lunchtime.

Annie watched her aunt closely to see its effect. Margaret Bailly seemed to be studying the lad in her quiet way, saying little and accepting his attentions with a sort of appreciative reserve. Meanwhile she helped Annie along with her good times, eking out her slim wardrobe with a new frock here, the loan of her own best blouse or slippers there and always little gifts of money when extra earnings made it possible.

Many an evening she stayed at the Hargan flat while Annie was "off gallivanting," as her mother expressed it.

"I don't like her tagging off up there on the river so much," she would say. "How do we know what she's doing or who she's with?"

"For heaven's sake, let her have some of the rights of youth!" Aunt Margaret would answer. "We can trust Annie to behave herself. She's a good girl, you know that, Jennie. As for young Carroll, he seems a nice, attractive boy."

"Attractive!" snapped Mrs. Hargan. "Attractiveness won't get him far. Can he make a living? Is he steady? Is he trained to anything regular, so he won't go traipsing off into one job after another and payin' his way with fine words and promises? How serious is it between 'em, anyway?" she added uneasily. Poor woman, she had spent her whole life living on "fine words and promises."

"Well, I don't just know," answered Margaret. "Shan't we have Annie ask him home some night, and you can judge for yourself?"

"Well — all right," Mrs. Hargan conceded grudgingly. "I want Annie to have all the good times she can. But I can't see her gettin' married unless it's to some man that's fixed in life and is willing to give us a helping hand. And you don't find many men that want to marry a girl's whole family. I don't see what's to become of us."

Neither did Aunt Moggie. So she kept silent.

It was arranged that Bernie should come to the house. Annie planned it for a Sunday so she could have the whole day to get ready in. First of all, the flat must be swept and garnished, the kitchen scrubbed and the soupy smell aired out. Then Annie's cot in the corner of the living room had to be made to look like a couch, with an old shawl of Aunt Moggie's spread over it.

The red-checked tablecover had to be washed and ironed and the worst spots rubbed out of the drugget with hot water and ammonia. Then Annie dusted everything and thinned out the collection of broken ornaments, medicine bottles, brushes and combs, hair ribbons, collars and other odds and ends of small wear that always graced the mantelpiece, her mother protesting at intervals that she didn't see any use in taking so much trouble.

Annie did, however, and it was well toward 5 o'clock, the hour of Bernie's coming, when she had the children neated up and herself washed and dressed in a presentable frock.

She was very tired. And nervous for fear her mother would be in one of her querulous moods, or the children — on tiptoe to see sister's caller — would make nuisances of themselves, as children of eleven and eight usually can.

Bernie came at last, bringing a long-stemmed yellow chrysanthemum wrapped in tissue paper. He intended it for Annie. But Annie, for diplomatic reasons, made her mother believe it was a delicate attention shown to her. Bernie, catching the tiny deception and meeting Annie's eyes, whispered "I getcha," as he slipped past her to lay his hat on the couch. Somehow it put them at ease, and things passed off not so badly. Of course it was like Aunt Moggie to happen in and take the children for a walk. And after they had gone Mrs. Hargan thawed enough to propose that Annie make a cup of tea.

This helped matters still more, and although the cups were cracked and the saucers didn't match, and the sugar

was "A" sugar and lumpy, and there was nothing but ginger snaps to eke out, Annie felt a glow of triumph round her heart and was content.

She and Bernie went for a walk afterward in Stuyvesant Square and sat on a bench. They said little. But the understanding that had run all along like a subterranean stream seemed stronger than ever. When she felt Bernie's arm go round the back of the bench and touch her shoulder, the same delicious thrill melted through her that she had felt at the Settlement House when Herbert Travis came in the room. Only this was better. There was a realness, a comfort in this — and a promise.

"Come on, Nan," said Bernie presently, "let's celebrate. D'yer like Chinese food — chop suey and that? I know a dandy place near here."

Annie sensed only the "Let's celebrate." Bernie was taking their engagement for granted, then! Oh, how glad she was about everything — how thankful! How wonderful the world was! How good it was to succeed and to be loved and to have a good time! With Bernie holding her elbow and walking close to her through the dusky park there seemed nothing lacking in her world. They passed a group of girls. One of them sang out: "H'illo, Ann! Can't you reco'nize any one?"

Annie jumped out of her trance and "reco'nized" her old friend of the factory, the "firebrand" girl. Annie smiled and waved.

"Who's that?" asked Bernie perfunctorily.

"Oh, a girl I used to work with in the factory," said Annie absently.

"Factory. I never knew you worked in a factory."

"Umh-hum," answered Annie briefly.

Bernie hugged her arm closer and smiled down into her face.

"Why, you ain't one bit like a factory girl!" he said. "I guess you didn't belong there — or stay there long. Any

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girl that wants to can work her way out of such a life." It was one of Bernie's favorite themes. "All you have to do is to make up your mind, and push yourself. Nobody needs a college education nowadays to get along. There ain't hardly a rich man in the chemical business, or one of the fellows that's cleaned up big, but what's picked up his education where he could, and got along just by hard plugging. I guess that girl was one of those discontented troublemakers. She looked it."

Annie vaguely felt there was something wrong in Bernie's argument, but was too happy to decide what it was or try to combat it. It was so good just to be happy, and let Bernie do the thinking, right or wrong.

They reached the "Golden East Restaurant and Chop Suey Parlor," and when they were inside the door of the entry, at the foot of a handsome flight of marble stairs, Bernie suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her.

Annie shut her eyes to exclude the world. In that swift instant of her love's embrace, life sang a harmony so ineffably sweet that the echoes of all past sadnesses were stilled. The joy of it was almost past bearing. . . .

Then they ran up the stairs, blushing and self-consciously happy, and found themselves in an oriental atmosphere such as Annie's narrow experience had never compassed. There were embroidered panels on the walls depicting Chinese scenes, and here and there mirrors framed in carven, gilded wood in intricate designs of men and monsters.

Lanterns depended from the painted ceiling, marvels of color and complex ornament, with silken tassels and pendants of glass that tinkled in the breeze. They sat at a small teakwood table in a corner. There was marble set in the top of it, and its rim and legs were wondrously ornate. Bernie gave an order to the smiling slant-eyed yellow man who seemed in some inscrutable fashion to sense their secret, and padded off to serve them. The stuffy air seemed charged with a delicious magic.

Bernie suddenly laid his hand over Annie's as it lay on the gorgeous table and whispered:

"Well, I guess it's all right with us two, ain't it?"

Annie could find no words. She closed her eyes an instant, smiled and gave the hand a little squeeze.

As long as she lived, she never forgot the thrill of that moment in that strange oriental setting which seemed so marvelously beautiful to her. She never afterward saw a windowful of Chinese merchandise, or even glimpsed the dingy cubbyhole where Sing Hop did his laundering without recalling that evening, that meal, the tiny green bowls of tea and the touch of Bernie's hand as he uttered his commonplace words.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SOME REASONS "WHY"

A FEW days later Annie again encountered the "fire-brand girl" in Stuyvesant Square. As before, Annie was too absorbed in her own world of delight and promise to see the girl as she passed.

"Hoo-hoo — hello, Ann!"

"Oh — why, hello, Nena!"

"What's the matter that you never see anybody? This is twice you've rushed right by me. Gettin' too swell to notice us shop girls?"

"No, Nena, you know better. I was only thinking of something else — something at the office."

"So! It's office work now! Where you working?"

"In a place on Fulton Street. Chemicals and things. I'm a stenographer, Nena. I never could go back into the shops again after — after the fire."

"Hm — lots of girls had to," answered Nena, biting off her words. "Come on, let's sit down a minute. In a hurry?"

"N-no," said Annie, though she was expecting Bernie to call and take her to the moving pictures later. They found room on a bench. Nena watched the throng of home-going shop people a moment as they trudged across the square from the loft buildings west to their tenements east. Annie was the first to resume the talk.

"Nena, it's so wonderful, doing this kind of work — in an office, I mean. Just think, the hours are only from 9 to 5:30. And there are nice people to work with, and different things to do — not just glueing your eyes on a machine-needle all day and afraid to move or speak for fear the boss'll crack his whip over you!"

"I'm getting twelve now, and I'll maybe get a raise the



Bernie suddenly laid his hand over Annie's.

first of the year if—" She was going to say "if I ain't married by that time," but thought it best to keep Bernie out of this conversation. "—if nothing happens," she finished instead.

"Why don't you girls get loose from the factory, Nena? There's loads of chances to get along, once you've made up your mind to dig at night school and give up going to places. You're smart, Nena, you could do it. I heard you talk that night at the memorial meeting. Why do you waste your time trying to get girls to go on strikes? Why don't you tell them to get out of it all—and why don't you get out of it?"

Annie was unconsciously quoting Bernie.

The "firebrand" had been listening attentively, a half smile playing round her lips. As Annie paused the smile became twisted and mirthless and scornful.

"Huh—you got the nice, smug ideas, haven't you?" she responded, looking at Annie with her smoldering dark eyes. "Who's been teaching you, the fine young man I saw you with Sunday? Well, now, please, will you let me tell you a few things that maybe you don't know!"

She spoke with the accent of the Russian Jewish tongue, sounding the "hard g" where the "ing" should be, and putting thrills into her low tones in the way that had so stirred the well-dressed audience at the "memorial meeting."

"Listen—you're a nice girl, Ann, and I like you. You slaved at the Circle shop same as the rest of us. You was near dead, too, from the work and the heat and that. You was hungry, maybe, sometimes. *But never as bad as us!* I'll tell you why.

"You're American-born, for one thing. Oh, yes, maybe your father was Irish, and came away from a poor home. But *you* could always speak the language. You never had to be hooted at in the street because you didn't know how to talk English and called 'Sheeny' and get spit at!"

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"And your pa and your ma, no matter if they *was* poor, they wasn't slaves like our people, kicked around and starved and shut up in places and kept from knowing anything! *You had folks back of you*, Annie Hargan, that made you what you are now. Folks that had their health and strength and were free to go where they liked and do what they liked — not like my folks in Russia!

"You got only four in your family, too. And you live in three rooms. I got nine in my family, and we only got one room more.

"You got a bed right by a window where you get air. My sister and my two little brothers and me all sleep in one room and it has no window at all! And what was your father? He got a place as a bookkeeper or something, didn't he? And earned maybe sixteen, eighteen dollars? My father was a tailor. He got eleven dollars a week. Eleven dollars for nine people! I never knew what it was in my life to have enough to eat till I was past sixteen. What do *you* know about bein' hungry!

"Besides, you got an aunt — a nice lady with education and a job in an office. If your folks got in trouble, she'd help you. At least, you wouldn't starve. When I started work in the shops I got six dollars a week, stitching cuffs. Nothing else — just stitching cuffs. They never put me on anything else, so I never could learn anything else. If I was sick one day, the whole family had to eat less that week. My brother had his hands froze pickin' coal from dumps.

"I used to work nights till I fainted in front of my machine. And my ma used to take in pants-finishing for four cents a dozen! I remember a lady come around once from some settlement house and scolded my mother for letting the kids work on the pants. And told her that if she needed any help she should go ask the Charities. What I want to know is *where does this city save anything by letting us people work our hands off for nothing, and then sending us*

*to the Charities to get helped?* That's what I want to know.

"I tell you it makes me sick, this sympathy we get for being poor! We don't want sympathy. We want help to *change* things! Swell chance we've got to 'get along' like you say, and 'improve ourselves' like that woman at the settlement house used to tell us girls! Tell me — where's our chance? Why, we haven't *got* any chance! Unless it's strikes. And that's my business from now on.

"I'm glad you've got your nice work, and your young man, and everything," finished Nena Rabinovitch in a softer voice, getting up to go, "but don't go getting any snob ideas that everybody in this free country's got a chance! If they're born with good health and character enough to push their way through alive, like me, maybe they have. But I ain't going to get smug and go ahead of them. I'm going to stay back and help the others get a chance to live. Good-night, Ann."

Annie walked slowly home. The girl Nena had thrown her mind into chaos. She began to realize the "snob ideas" she had fallen into by reason of her success and happiness. She began to examine her "success" more closely. Success? She had twelve dollars a week, and might get fourteen in a month or two. Fourteen would just about keep her family going, with a tiny margin for a rainy day — in case she or Aunt Moggie got sick or something.

If she married Bernie right off, and went to housekeeping on his twenty-dollar wage, what would happen at home? Annie had lost sight of these ugly facts in her golden glow of love.

Janie was only eleven. It would be *five years* before she would be able to take Annie's place as breadwinner for the family. Unless — unless she started as Annie did, at barely fourteen, in the basement of a store, and then went into the factory. The factory —

Annie remembered and renewed her oath that never, never should Janie go into a factory. Better love deferred indefinitely. Better even break her engagement with Bernie and leave him free to find some girl who could bring him immediate happiness! At this thought tears of despair gushed to her eyes as she climbed the grimy stairs of her tenement. She couldn't give Bernie up. She must find some other way out.

They had not yet discussed the date of their wedding. The most definite stamp which had been placed upon their relation was Bernie's insistence on a ring. And this had so glorified the situation that Annie's thoughts had not extended further for the time.

In due course the dear emblem arrived — a tiny diamond for which Bernie had pledged himself to payments for many future months. When he had slipped it on her finger with "a kiss for her, a kiss for him and a third for both," Annie looked down at it lovingly, but with a wee gleam of worry in her eyes. She turned it round and round thoughtfully, not speaking.

"Come! What's the gloom about?" said Bernie, catching her hands and making her look into his face.

"No gloom, Bern! I was just thinking —"

"Well, quit thinking and come on up to Gilbert's; they got a new bill there this week."

Between two scenes of the play at Gilbert's stock company theater where seats were "ten, twenty, thirty" and a lot for your money, Bernie reached for his girl's hand, felt the ring on it and whispered:

"Now, when are we gonna get married?"

"Oh, Bernie," Annie whispered back, holding tight to his thumb, "not for a long, long while."

"Wha-a-t?"

Annie nodded positively, but the darkness hid her worried look. Bernie supposed she was coquetting.

"Aw, quit being coy. April, huh?"

"Oh, Bernie, no!" Then, as he hitched nearer and was in danger of making them conspicuous if the lights went up, Annie added, "I'll tell you after," and so postponed her task.

As they walked home after the show Bernie reopened the subject.

"Why not April?" he said tersely.

"Oh, Bernie, why would we be in such a hurry? I'm not nineteen yet." Annie sparred for time.

"What's the odds? There ain't any age limit, is there? How old do you have to be? You've had practice house-keeping."

"But we want to start nice, Bern, and have money saved and — and all."

"That'll be all right by April. A little bunch of us fellows have a pool, Nan, that's certain sure to net us all a tidy bit. Go on, Nance, put it down for April," he pleaded. How Annie longed to say yes.

There was silence for a minute. Then:

"What's wrong, Annie — don't you like me well enough? Ain't I a good enough match? What's the matter?"

"Oh, Bernie —" Annie snuggled up a little, holding tightly to his arm as if to keep him from starting away when she told her serious reason. "My folks need what I'm earning. If we got married so soon who'd take care of them? I'll — I'll have to go on — a little while — just till things are easier home —"

She felt the current of disappointment, of reaction, that passed through him, just as plainly as though he had said something to express his impatience. So, she was right; he was going to be disapproving. She sensed it in his silence, in the way he quickened his walk.

"You've got your grandmother, too, Bernie," she urged. "She looks to you for everything, just as my folks do to me. Hadn't we better have a little longer engagement? Things'll take a turn. And maybe there'll be some new

arrangement home, or something. I'm going to get a raise first of the year. Maybe Aunt Margaret will, too — and you and all of us. And you'll make good in lots of pools!" She could feel a tiny picking up of cheeriness now in his manner. She had touched the right note — the note of his self-confidence.

His natural goodness of heart reënforced his willingness to "let it go at that, then," and they parted lingeringly on the doorstep, in both their hearts the glamor of youth and love.

But Annie did not deceive herself. It would have to be a long wait, unless a miracle happened. With wavering confidence she peered into the long, slow years ahead. The triumph of winning him faded into doubts of holding him. Suppose he met other girls? How should she compete with prettier faces, better clothes, the battery of charm put forth by those who specialized in pleasing men? How keep his interest aglow, yet short of passion? How should she, the inexperienced, the hard-toiling little Annie, learn such art of coquetry as would keep the fires alight with only honest love to feed them?

Bernie went swinging home, hopeful and happy. Annie slowly climbed the stairs, weighted with her problem. . . .

## CHAPTER XX

### THE SPELL BREAKS

WHEN the first of the year came, Bernie Carroll asked old man Simms for a raise, and got it. He now had twenty-two dollars a week. Sometimes he made a few dollars extra in the pools he and his cronies formed to "take fliers" in the chemical stocks they felt they knew about. The fliers were puny affairs, but Bernie was proud of his sportsmanship and whenever his wallet was better furnished than usual would renew his pleas to Annie for their immediate marriage.

"Ah, come on, Ann, this hanging around's beginning to get my nerve," said he one night, as they stood bidding good-by in the tenement hallway. "We're spending enough on theaters and boat rides to keep up a flat." Annie winced. It wore upon her to keep refusing and postponing, yet whenever she was on the verge of giving in, came the clutch of family responsibility to hold her back. She didn't belong to herself, nor to Bernard, but to her mother and Janie and little Jim. Was any one ever free — *ever*?

"But — oh, Bernie!" She looked at him with helpless, worried eyes, pleading for understanding and sympathy.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," came the answer. "Same old thing month in, month out — you've got to keep the house going. Well —" He hesitated, evidently on the edge of a suggestion he knew would not be pleasing.

"Well, what?" There was the least edge of resentment in Annie's tone.

"Well — why can't your Aunt Margaret live with your family?" Bernard jerked it out defiantly. "That's the solution. If they'd club together they'd get along fine and

it would let you out. Your aunt could pay board and that would pay the rent of a nicer place, with something left over at that. Why, I'd even be willing to peel off a couple of dollars a week to help out if it was needed. Only it wouldn't be, if they'd use a little common sense."

"Listen, Bern!" There was a sharpness to Annie's voice, an earnest gleam in her eyes. She had thought this out before. "I want you to understand this once and for all, dear. My Aunt Moggie has helped me ever since I was born. She sha'n't be a slave to me forever. She's made her big choice. She gave up love, marriage, children, a home — everything Mother had — in order to have a little independence and a clean, orderly life of her own.

"I'm not going to ask her now to have neither the one thing or the other, but the struggle and horridness of both. I simply won't do it!"

"Bernie —" she went on after a pause, "I guess I oughtn't make you wait for me! But marrying you now will mean sacrificing my Aunt Moggie or else putting Janie into a factory when she's fourteen, and I won't do that, not if we never marry. Jane's going to a trade school — I've made up my mind to that. She's going to learn millinery, and do for herself the things I never could do for myself.

"Jane's twelve, Bern. She's a smart kid, Janie is. I shouldn't wonder if she got through school next year. Then she's got to have two years in the trade school. And then — and then — we could get married."

Bernard's face went blank. He stared down at Annie, saying nothing. Annie looked away, with sinking heart. There was a moment of tenseness for both. She identified his expression and braced herself for the outburst she knew was coming.

"My God, Nan! Do you know what you're asking me? I tell you I'm no mollycoddle, to sit round for years twiddling my thumbs or taking you to picnics and dances, leaving you on the doorstep after, and trotting home like a little

lamb! What kind of a dub do you think I am, a wooden man? It ain't right, now, is it—I put it to you?"

So rebellion had come, just as she knew it would!

Annie felt she was standing on sand that waves were washing from under her feet. She was going down, down, down, and could not stop herself. Down into drabness and loneliness again. Nothing ahead but work and weariness. She had failed. She couldn't hold him, *of course* she couldn't. . . .

Tears were coming. She tried to force them back, but nervous sobs began to shake her. Her one desire was to get away and struggle with her humiliation alone.

"All—all right, Bern," she gasped; "if you can't wait—and of course you can't—I oughtn't expect it—just let me go. You're free. I don't blame you, Bernie." She began pulling at the little diamond ring on her finger.

Bernard hesitated, looked ashamed, sorry—and then drew her quickly into his arms.

"There, there, Nance," he began to apologize. "I didn't mean it. I'll wait—half my life if it's necessary. I'll—"

Annie squirmed from his hold. Wiping her eyes and catching her breath, she stood back and looked at him miserably but with determination in her face. She was seeing it *his way* now. She understood.

"No, Bern. It isn't right. It's not fair to you. You're free. I mean it. I won't have it any other way."

Now she was putting him on the defensive as women have a way of doing even in weakness. Bernie veered.

"Aw, now, Annie," he began, "let's—"

"No, Bern. It's finished!" She stopped short, reached and fumbled, and thrust something into his waistcoat pocket. "Good night!" And in a flash she had run up the stairs and disappeared. She paused with thumping heart outside her door, hoping he would come after her. But all was still. Young Carroll stood where she had left him, a very puzzled and indignant boy. He dug the little ring from his pocket

and tossed it meditatively in his palm. So! She turned him down, did she? Couldn't understand a fellow! Or be reasonable and make allowances. Oh, all right—he shrugged angrily, put the ring back, jammed his hat down on his head and strode out, banging the door savagely.

Victorian authoresses who permitted the disappointed-in-love to find quick peace in the grave may have gone too far in calling it death from heartbreak. Yet every doctor knows what worry and depression do to the circulation, digestion and nerves. Victorian heroines, having nothing to take their minds off their misery, may easily have passed from "heartbreak" into well defined diseases which carried them off with dispatch if not with poetry.

At any rate it was the fact that little Annie Hargan, feeling dead inside from halted circulation, weak from her stomach's protest against food, and all a-quiver with nerves, fell ill and was away from the office a week.

If there had been no family budget to provide for, even Annie might have indulged in the Victorian luxury of dying. As it was, she forced her muscles into some sort of obedience and duly found herself back at Simms's. Kissing the anxious face of her Aunt Margaret, whom she met in the corridor and murmuring the usual meaningless "Don't worries," and "I'm all rights" she entered the office just as Bernard emerged.

Annie's heart gave a sharp catch. Would he rush up to her, contrite and pleading—wiping out with one gesture the horrible week just past and restoring the roselight that should color the years ahead? Indeed, he did nothing of the sort, but darted by with a murmured "Hello" and an embarrassed yank at his hat-brim.

With a sick little feeling of collapse, Annie's heart resumed its beat, her feet moved automatically deskward. But she did not reach it immediately. Halfway across the room she became aware of a Presence—a highly-colored

and flame-like creature standing before the office mirror humming casually as she pulled and patted her hair into satisfactory contours.

Her elbows still on a level with her ears, Miss Connie Durant turned slightly, and with a glance and a slurred "Goo' mornin'" dismissed Annie as among the entirely unimportant things in her life.

Connie was of the type of office worker who approaches her telephone switchboard in all the glad panoply of the ballroom. As she strollingly sunned herself on Broadway in the lunch hour people felt she had somehow slipped down from the more appropriate zone of Forty-second Street. For that matter, Miss Durant did have her ambitions. But she also had a stern relative whose lifework was to keep Connie as far as possible within bounds.

"You cut out them burlesque ideels of yours," warned the relative, "and get somethin' genteel in the office line."

"Oh, very well," said Connie, who knew how to have a good time anywhere. She could profit by the relative's hospitality for a while, and try upper Broadway later. On the second day of Annie's absence Miss Durant had been sent by the telephone company in response to the office boy's urgent:

"Say, shoot us over a hello goil. And say — make it one that's easy to look at while you're about it; get me?"

Arriving, she had looked over the collection of males at Simms's with fair-to-middling satisfaction. She chose to begin with Bernard because of the spice lent by the gossip of his engagement to another girl. Now that she had seen the other girl, however, the week of attention she had bestowed upon Bernie seemed hardly worth the trouble. It was too easy. There wouldn't be any sport in it. This Hargan girl wasn't the kind that would fight back.

Still, it might be worth trying. You never could tell.

She left the mirror reluctantly and sat down before the switchboard, upon the shelf of which lay a bag of jelly-beans and a novel called "The Flaming Torch." She would

watch this mouselike Hargan girl with the eyelashes, and see what she could see.

Meanwhile Annie, numb with misery, went to her desk and began sharpening lead pencils as an excuse for lowering her eyes and appearing occupied. She knew as well as though she had seen it that Bernie, as he brushed by her, had just come from a conversation with this girl. She felt now that she need hope no longer for a renewal of the engagement. She couldn't compete with this sort of girl, for Annie knew all too well the lure of the red lip and the georgette blouse, the manicured nails, the silken hose and, above all, the silken manner. . . .

It didn't take Miss Durant long to see there was trouble between Bernard and Annie. But that the trouble had its roots in her scenic self, she very rightly doubted. And Connie Durant had much the sporting instincts of a cat. She liked her mice alive. To tackle one that something else had killed took all the zest away.

Of course from sheer instinct she kept on smiling at Bernard and encouraging him into listening attitudes at her desk. But she now believed the city sales manager a more promising quarry and kept her best wiles for him. To poor little Annie, however, she seemed a Venus and a Circe combined, and each day brought fresh tortures and throttled hope.

For a month that seemed a year she struggled on, hating herself, hating Connie, hating her work and the office that had turned to a torture-chamber from a realm of sheer delight. To see Bernie daily, going in and out; to wonder what his movements were and how often he was with Miss Durant; to imagine his disappointment at Annie's failure to work out a solution of the engagement problem and at the same time his probable satisfaction in being free again—all this wore upon Annie beyond bearing. She couldn't work. She couldn't breathe the atmosphere.

A dozen times she was on the point of recalling Bernie,

begging forgiveness, promising anything, abandoning all pride. But once she thought she saw amusement in the eyes of Connie Durant, and knew the moment had come for flight. She hunted a new position and was frightened at the promptness with which she found one. Now the old ties *must* be cut.

Meanwhile Aunt Margaret Bailly was studying the situation and agonizing over Annie's pain. Her spinster heart was fiercely unwilling to see a romance ended. Moreover, she liked Bernie Carroll and believed there was substantial character to him. She saw the crude lure of Connie, like a signboard at some spiritual crossroads—"This way to life's marshes." And Annie's unobtrusive fingerpost—"This way lies love."

She longed to steer Bernard down the right path and felt it needed but a push to do it. This, clearly, was the moment for the push, if she could only find the way to give it.

If Annie took herself out of Bernie's path by accepting the new job, Margaret saw her own life duplicated for her niece. Annie would be more successful than she, but probably just as lonely. And Bernie would go will-o'-the-wisp into the marshes. Where'd be the gain?

The right push given, Margaret felt, and the path of life would stretch fairly smooth for her well-loved child—a path somewhere between her own ascetically peaceful one and the turmoiled path of Annie's mother. The crux of the situation, she finally decided, was not Connie Durant, who could be brushed aside as easily as a painted cardboard doll, but Annie's sister Janie.

Margaret determined to speed Janie up, cut down Annie's term of waiting for marriage and thus have at least a strong "talking point" from which to win Bernie over to the position of persistent yet patient lover for a shortened period.

During Annie's last week at Simms's, Aunt Moggie visited Janie's school and learned it was possible with extra coaching for her to do two terms in one and win her diploma

## A CHANCE TO LIVE

in a year at most. She resolved to drill Janie evenings and Saturdays and whenever else the chance offered. She believed in her.

She found the trade school course in millinery could also be hurried and that a bright girl was often in demand at a wage of ten or twelve a week, though still under the age of sixteen. If Janie was over fifteen and could show a diploma and a clean bill of health, the law said, she could take such a position provided it did not call for "more than eight hours' labor a day" and was not an occupation "dangerous to health."

It began to look as though fewer years need be bridged before Annie and Bernie could marry.

## CHAPTER XXI

### BERNIE CHOOSES A ROAD

“**B**ERNARD?”

“Yes, Miss Margaret.”

“I—I think we’re all standing at a sort of crossroads. You know how I love—Annie. And I’m—very fond of you, Bernard. I think if you haven’t known it before, you’re guessing it now, for I couldn’t do this if I wasn’t. I—I’d just let you go.”

Aunt Moggie was not used to preaching. She wasn’t used to young people, except her Annie. She felt as awkward now, having summoned Bernie by a note signed primly “M. Bailly,” as a gawky child at her first boy-and-girl party. She was horribly afraid of boring Bernie, of seeming to meddle, of appearing in his eyes just a fussy old maid with cold-storage views of life. Yet she had a desperately important task in hand and what she set out to do she did, whether it was reading her nightly “Chapter” no matter how tired she was, or saving her niece’s happiness.

“Yes, ma’am, Miss Margaret,” said Bernie, studying his boot-tips and hitching into step.

They were walking along Fulton Street toward the car Aunt Moggie took to her furnished room. It was funny, but his getting into step with her—just that trifling thing—gave her courage somehow, and she went determinedly on:

“Tell me, Bernard, just as if you were talking to your own mother, do you want to go? Do you want to—marry this Miss Durant”—it cost her gentle heart an effort to drag Connie in—“or any one else—right now; you’re young, Bernard, not twenty-two?” Bernard nodded.

"Would it be terribly hard to wait — say, *two years?* Or just a tiny bit longer?"

Bernie lifted his chin with a good gesture and looked at Miss Baily straightly.

"Listen, Miss Moggie," said he. "Don't get the idea I'm a skunk. I tried to make it up with Ann that night. But she wouldn't have it. She got on her high horse and I got peevish and we — we broke, that's all. I'm crazy about Ann — you know that. But she got talking about a four or five years' wait and wouldn't listen to anything reasonable and gave me back the ring and everything, and I just naturally got sore. It was final, she said."

"I don't believe anything a girl says when she's heartsick is final," said Margaret, "but it's going to be, Bernard, if you don't act quickly. Now, I've figured out a way to make her free to marry sooner than you thought. The question is, do you want the kind of girl Annie is, or — or the other kind, like the young woman in the office?"

"I want Annie," said Bernard with a hesitation too slight to be measured. "She's the salt of the earth; the other one's froth."

"Well, here's my car," said Margaret. "You think it over and come see Annie to-night if you make up your mind. She's found another place and she's leaving Simms's Saturday. Good night."

At quarter to eight Bernie appeared upon the crack-stoned, pock-railing stoop of the Hargan tenement. In his coat pocket was a pound of Mexican kisses in a box with the picture of a rose-lipped señorita on the cover. In his vest pocket was Annie's little diamond ring. In his heart was an ardor born of the risk of losing. Annie staying on at the office with her wistful eyes was one thing. Annie with a new and better job, giving up the game and taking a new path, was another.

Annie, coming down the rickety stairs to post a letter,

walked into a world of rose and gold and heady ethers of delight. For here was her laddie come again. . . .

"Nance!"

"Oh — *Bernie!*"

The tenant on the ground floor opened her door on a crack, but had the grace to close it upon the tableau of Annie squirming from Bernie's grasp.

"There's a peach of a dance at the club to-night," said Bern, holding his girl at arm's length.

"Is there, Bernie?" Dear Lord, how good it was to know joy again!

"Sure — and we're going. Don't fix up. Gee — that's the thing you had on the first time I took you. Wear that; I like it."

"What, this old thing? Why, it's awful!" Of course she'd say it, even with a million ecstasies singing in her soul! He had remembered. . . .

"It isn't; it's a cute little tog. Now do as I say. Run up and tell 'em we're off to the club dance. Here — wait a second —" He fished the little ring from his pocket and held it out to her. She snuggled her face in his coat, holding out her bereaved left hand for him to attend to. With an exaggerated grunt he pushed the gold hoop past the knuckle. And Annie cried "Ouch!" and Bernie kissed the finger, receiving a pat of reproof on the nose. And they both laughed, and looked at each other, and laughed some more while the blessed ingredients of happiness were mixing in their souls. Doubt fled. Hope and mutual confidence again blest and glorified life.

"And — and Bern?" Annie was looking down at her re-dressed finger, turning the ring round and round.

"Yeah?"

"Are you sure, perfectly, absolutely positive you don't like that — that Miss Durant at the office better than me?"

The answer called for action rather than words, and to Bernard's credit be it said that he suitably replied.

Halfway up the staircase Annie stopped suddenly, smoothing her hair.

"Oh — and, Bern!"

"What now?"

"Only that I'm leaving Simms's, Saturday —"

"Nance, you're doing nothing of the sort! Now will you go on up and get your hat and get down again, or will I have to come up there and make you!" He made a fierce rush toward Annie's heels, which staccatoed merrily to the Hargan door. Gee, but it was great to feel merry again! Gee, but it was!

On the way uptown on the Third Avenue "L" Annie reopened the matter of leaving Simms's.

"You're not going to do it!" repeated Bernard.

"But I'm to get fifteen at the new place."

"Well, talk up to Simms and make him come across."

"He won't," said Annie. But she was too ecstatic about other things to pursue the subject.

On Saturday old man Simms settled the matter unexpectedly himself. He had eaten a soggy dumpling the night before, which threatened to ruin his half-holiday game of golf. Ordinarily he might have forgiven his switchboard operator for twice getting him a wrong number. But when Simms was being skewered through the pit of the stomach by a demoniac dumpling he grew impatient with wrong numbers. He got his party at last, only to catch his voice vaguely above a sound as of the roar of many waters. He jiggled the hook and shouted "Hello" until the pain in his midriff gave him pause.

Miss Durant was not by any means asleep at the switchboard. On the contrary, she was enjoying an animated conversation with the city sales manager. Having once plugged in Simms's cord and the cord of the "party" she felt her full duty done, nor saw the three white slits that indicated Simms's wire, winking frantically for help. But the S O S went unheeded. Connie dallied fatally on.

It was not until loud thuds were heard as of angry O'Sullivan's approaching that Connie turned her lambent orbs from the object of her wiles. It was then too late.

With some of the crudenesses abridged, Mr. Simms's words were these:

"Skyrockets and pinwheels! Can I get a little service from this condemned office force or can I not! What the dum-dum, blink-blunk bow-bows are you two doing out here anyhow? Hodge, I'll thank you to attend to a little of *my* business this morning if you've got the leisure. And you, Miss — Miss — Whatsname — it's five minutes to twelve, when your half holiday commences. I give you the five minutes. And you can take all the rest of your life for a holiday so far as I'm concerned. But you can't take it in my office. Where's Annie Hargan? Get her to this switchboard — A-hh!" A spasm of pain cut him short and he thumped back to his private office, leaving quite a stir behind him.

His number on a clear wire was finally got for him. But it was nearly one o'clock before Annie had a chance for a quiet word.

"I'm leaving to-day, you know, Mr. Simms," she began — and got no further.

"Leaving? Leaving? What are you talking about? It's that featherbrained wax show-figure out there that's leaving!"

"But it was all understood that —"

"Understood nothing! You stay here. Tell 'em your pay's boosted. Whatever they're paying you, I'll pay."

"But —"

"No buts about it. Come, come, open your book and take a letter to Barnes. Send him another statement and tell him we'll sue him if he don't pay up. We'll make Barnes furnish your raise. Ow-w—"

Indigestion is unpleasant, but it is often an excellent shaper of destinies.

As Annie went out of Simms's office, she bumped into Bernie in the hall.

"Nance! What's up, anything? You look funny."

"Mr. Simms has dyspepsia," said Annie; "he's feeling so badly that I really can't leave. The—telephone needs me too," she added demurely, tracing little circles on the cover of her notebook.

Bernard hesitated an instant, caught her meaning, and put his arm about her shoulder.

"You're—not sorry *she's* gone?" whispered Annie.

"Don't be foolish," said Bern. "Come on, let's go to lunch."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE RENTED WEDDING

JANIE made good the family's confidence in her by graduating with flying colors at thirteen and a half. Annie saw to it that Janie had the white frock and sash, the armful of roses, and the gold ring with the date engraved upon it that she had hoped at her own graduation, and through the tragedy of her father's death had missed.

Then came the trade school, and Janie took to it like a duckling to a brook.

"Only a little while now," Annie would whisper to Aunt Margaret. "If only Bernie doesn't get worn out with waiting — chuck it all!"

"He won't, dear," Aunt Moggie always answered. But sometimes she had to force confidence into her voice.

Margaret Bailly was not a deep thinker along sociologic lines, but she often found herself musing on the curious economic viewpoint of a state that spent millions annually on rescue homes and reform schools which were filled with boys and girls who "fell" through lack of earning ability. She wondered why some of the millions were not spent at the other end of the game — to keep girls like Janie at trade schools till they were fitted for earning, instead of leaving the "bridging over" to be done at the expense of a sister's happiness and marriage and motherhood. It was all a muddle and a puzzle.

But time wore on as it has a way of doing despite worries and disappointments, setbacks and toil. Janie was "going on" sixteen and thanks to a hundred family sacrifices was ready at last for earning! She knew how to sew, and she knew it thoroughly and in a specialized way. She would

never have to start at a factory machine for six dollars a week. She was going to enter a wholesale millinery house and get ten dollars to start!

She got her "permit" from the Board of Health — and invisibly was the burden of breadwinning shifted from Annie's shoulders to her sister Janie's.

"Now we'll be married, dear," whispered Annie, her face hidden against Bernie's coat.

For answer Bernie kissed her. But after the long, long wait there seemed just a tinge less romance in his attitude, just a shade of something missing. The zenith of the arc had been passed, that was all.

"We'll be married two weeks from Saturday," said Annie, her eyes bright with happiness.

"All right, Nan," answered Bernie. Once he would have said, "Aw, Nance, come on, make it now. What's the sense waiting? Let's get married to-day."

Annie tried to quicken his interest by planning for the flat. She had dreamed of that neat flat "uptown" until she felt she knew its exact location, the arrangement of rooms and everything in them down to the smallest detail of the flowered quilt upon the bed! She had held a vision of her wedding finery — the white satin frock, the billowing veil, the wreath about her head, "maybe of real orange blossoms." And there would be refreshments "after." Her mother would have a new silk dress. Annie had thought of these festive clothes so long that she had actually to alter their style many times in her mind to conform to passing modes.

What troubled her now, though, was the money to buy these things. With Janie only earning ten, Annie dared not use her meager hoard of savings that had been scraped, dollar by dollar, with the greatest effort, against the rainy day. She was free enough to marry, but she was not yet free of the necessity for helping with the household budget.

"What do you make such a fuss about clothes for?"

Bernie protested. "Who cares for all that foolishness? I hate this hullabaloo about a wedding. Wish we could just sneak off somewhere and have an alderman do it."

How like a man! What did Bernie know of a girl's dreams of white satin and orange blossoms? Annie was sensible, unselfish and inured to sacrifice. Yet with all her soul she longed for the white dress and veil and all the sentimental accouterments of bridal.

There seemed no way to get them, however, and Annie had made up her mind to renounce them and do as Bernie said, when she again chanced across Nena Rabinovitch, the "Firebrand Girl," who had given Annie, all in all, many lessons.

"Haven't seen you in ages, Ann. Whatcher looking so glum about?" greeted Nena. "Bad luck?"

"No. I oughtn't look glum. I'm going to be married!" Nena stopped short, her mouth ajar.

"Who to—some swell fellow, I'll bet!"

Annie pulled her along and they went over to their old haunt in Stuyvesant Square. "Come on, let's sit here a minute, and I'll tell you about it. He's a nice boy that I met in the office—"

She told the story of their meeting, their romance and their long, long wait for its fulfillment. Nena was interested and sympathetic. Her own life was dedicated to her Cause—the cause of her sister factory girls. The realm of love and marriage was not a familiar one to her, and she liked this little glimpse into it.

"Well, if everything's all right and you're going to get married, what were you looking so sad about?" she asked when Annie came to a pause.

"It's my wedding things. I haven't the money to get them. I suppose you think I'm awfully silly, Nena, to set my heart on a white dress and veil and all that. And a little refreshments after. But all my life I've dreamed of having a nice wedding. It won't seem like a wedding at

all if I have to wear a suit and hat. Do you think I'm foolish?" Annie asked wistfully.

"Foolish nothing!" exclaimed Nena. "Of course you want all the fixings that goes with it; I don't blame you. I would, too, if weddings were in my line. But you can have 'em."

Annie stared. "Have 'em? How?"

"Why, hire 'em, silly! What do you suppose all the girls on the East Side do that work for their living? Don't they have nice weddings with white satin and veils and a wedding cake and everything? They *rent* 'em!"

Nena sat back amusedly and watched Annie's face.

The idea of renting your wedding clothes was strange and a little repugnant to Annie. It did seem as if such things should belong wholly to you, like the ring and the man who gave it to you. The thought of other girls having shared a garment so sacred made her wince. Yet the flat she and Bernie would live in had been the home of others. If one rented a flat and its furnishings, why should the idea of renting personal furnishings be so unpleasant? It was, though. Still, perhaps, it was a solution. She looked into Nena's dark face consideringly.

"Would they be all right?" she asked, "— nice and — clean and everything?"

"*Sure* they would! Why, they ain't worn only a few hours each time, and everybody that has 'em is all scrubbed up and has cologne on and everything for a wedding. What's the sense buying a dress you'll only need once? After the marriage you'd just lay it away in a box and cry over it and keep it years and years till it's all out of style and yellow and no good.

"I tell you, Ann, this world's too full of practical things to go soaking in sentiment over something like that. I know a good place in Clinton Street where you can get grand dresses from \$4 up. And a veil and slippers and silk stockings and everything complete. They fit the dress to you,

and if it needs a little taking in or something, they do it, like in the morning, and that afternoon they send it up by a boy in a box. All you got to do is pay in advance and return the box the next afternoon when the boy comes for it.

"There's another thing while we're about it. You can rent a wedding cake, too — you know what I mean, not a cake to eat, but an ornament like. All white, with a girl and a man in wedding clothes on top, under a big bell. It'll look lovely on the refreshment table, and only fifty cents!"

Annie was thinking hard.

"How much would the whole thing cost, do you think, Nena?"

"Oh"—calculatingly—"you should get an outfit complete for about nine dollars, good quality too. If you bought the things it would cost you four or five times that. You can keep your job in the office a couple of weeks and pay for it, and you ain't out anything. Unless, of course," she added with feigned elegance of manner, "you're going on an extensive wedding trip!" And they both laughed good-humoredly.

That was an idea, too — keeping her job for a while. It would solve the vexed problem of contributing to the household expenses and leave a little nestegg that would be all her own and give her a glorious feeling of independence.

She parted from Nena in gay spirits, inviting "the Firebrand" to the little home wedding so soon to be.

On the way home she pondered whether Bernie would be willing to have her keep on working a little while. It would be such a simple solution to everything.

Illogically enough, she felt a shade of disappointment when, broaching the subject that evening, she had nothing to argue. Bernie agreed. The psychology of Bernard Carroll was the psychology of the average young man placed in similar circumstances.

Four years before, in the first onswEEP of passion and desire to found a home, he would have objected scornfully

to the idea of his wife's working in an office. But being thwarted in his purpose by the long wait for marriage, he had, first through necessity and then through habit, relinquished that keenness for husbandhood and fatherhood that had first urged him on. He had grown used to spending on himself and on Annie. His standards of comfort had risen a little. There was a trifle more calculation, a trifle less emotion about him now.

If Annie wanted to go on working for a while, why not? They could both have nesteggs, and as they both had obligations on the outside — Annie to her people, Bernie to his good old grandmother — it might make it easier all round. Bernie had plenty of uses for a nestegg. He knew a stock that, gee! if he could only get a hundred and fifty, say, he could make a bunch of change on!

So the wedding day came — a crisp, brilliant Saturday in October, that made your blood race and your hopes sing glorias. The little three-room flat was waiting, all a-bloom with its installment furniture and the few fully owned supplementals that were gifts from the office and from the ever-faithful Aunt Moggie.

Nena Rabinovitch cut out a mass meeting of prospective strikers to be present, and when the ceremony was over and the shiny new ring was on Annie's finger, and everybody had kissed her and Bernie had had to be warned not to "muss" the wedding veil with his bear hugs, Nena took Annie off in a corner and whispered proudly:

"Now, didn't the hired things go off all right, yes? So! I told you! You look grand, Ann; the dress fits perfect. And the veil — Oi, such style! The perfume goes good, too, eh? It's orange flowers, guaranteed. I'll tell you after where you can buy it wholesale. It's too bad you got to send the dress back nicer than you got it — all smelling of the extract."

Nena's gift to her friend had been a bottle of scent of

exquisite quality bought at the sacrifice of many luncheons. Annie hugged and kissed her and wondered why tears insisted on rising to her happy eyes.

Everybody had a box of *real* cake to take home, another of Aunt Moggie's contributions, though the rented masterpiece of white cardboard and enamel "icing," with the bride and groom a-top, had been very impressive and greatly admired. There was a "notice" duly put in the papers. And at last Annie and Bernie, in their rented coach, drove off to their rented flat, whence after changing their bridal finery for plainer garb, they were to go "on a trip" till Monday morning. Annie chose a boat tour up the Hudson to Albany, and it seemed to her as she stood by the rail with her good-looking young husband beside her that life *had* indeed kept its promise — at last. How she wished her father could be there to know!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A PROMISE IS TO BE KEPT

**W**HEN Annie and Bernard came home from their brief honeymoon Monday morning the city was drenched in rain. A cold, autumn soppiness bedraggled everything. They had a bag and a suitcase and Bernie insisted they take a cab home. To Annie it seemed an unthinkable extravagance. Their flat was uptown. The fare would be some horrible figure impossible for her inexperience to calculate.

"Well, what'll we do, ruin our clothes and save a couple of dollars?" said Bernie frowningly.

"But we can take the crosstown and transfer up Eighth," hazarded Annie, surveying the running gutters, the rain-lashed sidewalks. It was early and they had had no breakfast yet.

"And take an hour getting home! No, sir, we'll take a cab. Hey!" He motioned to a sleepy old cabman lolling in his seat on a "hansom." "How much'll it cost to go to St. Nicholas Avenue and a Hundred and Thirty-ninth?"

The man squinted at the streaming street and brought his indifferent gaze back to the modest couple, who did not look particularly promising as to tips.

"Three and a quarter," said he.

"What!" exploded Bernie. Annie tugged his sleeve.

"Don't let's, Bern. We can't afford it. Here's a car now."

"Oh, all right." Bernie was cross.

Annie tried to distract him and bring back his good humor all the way uptown. But the car jerked and stopped and started and stopped again, and got blocked by the traffic and crawled and crawled. And Bernie was very impatient.

They reached the flat finally. It thrilled Annie to the core

when Bernard opened their door with the latchkey and strode into the little place that was their actual sweet, neat home. She turned to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Oh, darling — it's *ours* — isn't it *wonderful?*"

"Look out, I'm soaking wet," said Bernie, kissing her hurriedly. "And look at my gloves — ruined! Gosh, is there any coffee in the house?"

"Yes, dear, Aunt Moggie saw to all that. The kitchen's stocked up with a lot of things. Oh, Bern —" Annie, inarticulate with emotions she couldn't have analyzed, stood clasping her hands and gazing round the little place that was now the world to her.

"Yeah," answered Bernie, vaguely. He was already in the bedroom getting off his wet collar and shoes. "Fix the breakfast in a hurry, will you, Nan, I've got to beat it to the office like anything. You don't have to go to-day. To-morrow'll be plenty of time."

When Bernard had gone, Annie stood motionless by the door where he had left her, thinking. Why was there a tiny tinge of disappointment about the homecoming? Why was not Bernie as enraptured as she with the rooms and the furniture and the first breakfast together and the delicious outlook of thousands of other breakfasts and dinners together in their cozy home? Had she fallen short in anything? Was she stupid to have insisted on the street car? Wasn't the coffee up to the mark? Or was it only that Bernie was wet and tired and in a hurry to get to the office?

Annie had never read philosophies. She had never heard the saying, "Man's love leaves off where woman's love begins." She didn't know that it was in the nature of the male to rejoice most in the zest of conquest and to relapse abruptly from the realization of his passion into the commonplaces of daily routine. At the end of the honeymoon man says, "Well, it's over." Woman smiles into the rosy face of the future with a "Well, it's just begun!"

Mrs. Bernard Carroll sighed without knowing it, tied on her checked apron and started clearing the breakfast things. Suddenly she remembered the rented wedding costume. The boy was to call for it that day. She hastily finished her housework and went to wrap up the box. She laid it out on the bed and lifted the garments out one by one, smiling at them as tenderly as though they had been her own.

She held up the veil. Its filminess brought a film to her eyes, she didn't know why. Gently she laid it on the bed and took up the satin frock. It still smelled of the orange flower extract Nena had given her. She smiled a little as she recalled Nena's regret that it must be sent back to the costumer "nicer than you got it" with the perfume on and everything! Then the slippers. Annie imagined they still bore the impress of her feet; nothing of the dozens, perhaps, of other brides' feet that had worn them. She wished the things were her own, after all, to put away and dream about, and maybe keep for her own daughter to be married in.

The front doorbell buzzed so sharply that Annie jumped, and dropped a slipper. The boy, of course, for the wedding costume. She hastily folded the things in the box, wrapped and tied it and gave it to the grimy, snuffling youngster with a little catch at her heart.

They weren't her things; they were only rented. Hers for a few hours, to be paid for and returned. Nothing in life seemed really to belong to her — to keep always. Everything seemed to be just "rented."

The next day Annie went back to the office and took up her work as before. Aside from the fact that she had got up earlier in preparation for the longer trip downtown, and prepared breakfast more carefully than she used to for herself in the home tenement, and would have to get something nice at the store for Bernie's supper, and cook it, and wash the dishes afterward — aside from all that, things seemed

just about the same. The clerks at the office "made a fuss over her." And some modest little presents straggled in from this girl and that, tendered with kisses and good wishes. And "old man Simms" looked over his glasses and "hoped she'd be happy." And the bookkeeper, who had always liked Annie, brought her a bunch of flowers from his garden in the suburbs — chrysanthemums and asters, and wished her joy and "that she wouldn't have to be working long at the office."

Bernie was too busy to take her out to lunch. Annie and Aunt Margaret went together, and Aunt Moggie broached the idea of the Hargans moving into a little better tenement.

"Dr. Kelley says your mother must have sunlight," she told Annie. "She's so thin, and don't seem to gain any strength. If they could get rooms in the next block, facing the vacant lot, the sun would be streaming in all day long. I've been around to see them. There's a nice little flat on the second floor, fourteen-fifty a month. I believe we could manage it if you and I both chipped in a little more each week."

"Well, I should say so!" cried Annie eagerly. "Let's take it and get them moved in right off!"

Annie did a little figuring that night. Bernie got \$22 a week. He gave her twelve to run the house on. Out of the twelve she paid the rent, which was nineteen dollars a month, or between three and four dollars a week, and bought all the food. There wasn't a large margin left for clothes and extras. Still, it was enough.

Out of the ten dollars Bernie had left he paid his carfare and lunches, his twenty-dollar a year dues to the Waterwitch Boat Club, his insurance policy for a thousand dollars, and the monthly installments on their furniture. Of the fifteen dollars a week Annie earned she gave her mother four dollars, which she was now going to increase to five dollars, so they could live in better, sunnier quarters. Out of the ten

that was hers she could still lay by a fat little sum each week for a nestegg and have enough for clothes and all incidentals without asking Bernie for anything.

The Hargans were duly moved into their new flat, and it was one of the outstanding delights of Annie's life when she bought with her own money a bright new rug for her mother and a bed with all new fixings. Janie, working diligently and getting on well, was taken to Bernie's boat club and introduced to "the fellows and girls." She was prettier than Annie, and more vivacious, and when Annie proudly noted what a good time she was having, her cup of happiness seemed filled to overflowing.

Bernie's work took him out of the office considerably, and he and Annie didn't always come home together. She usually left at 5, stopped at the grocer's and butcher's, carried her provisions home and had dinner ready by the time Bernie arrived. She loved to do it, and it did not cross her mind that she was contributing to the marriage more than Bernie was. If any one had suggested it to her, she would have said:

"Pooh! What does a man know about house things? Bernie couldn't cook an egg. He doesn't know chuck steak from chicory salad. It's a woman's business to know these things — and cooking's a change from the office."

One night Bernie came home radiant. He bounded into the kitchen, where Annie, in her pink checked apron, was frying chops, and held something under her nose.

"Smell o' that!" he cried gayly.

Annie tried to see what his hand concealed, sniffing vigorously at the same time.

"What is it, Bern? Don't tease me."

"Don't you know the smell of *money?*" he grinned, opening his hand and showing her a roll of greenbacks.

"Bernie!"

"Little pool some of the fellows and I went into," he said, triumphantly. "There's just seventy-five simoleons

in that wad! Easiest cash I ever made. Walton Chemical went sailing. I had a tip on it from a chap who works for the president of the concern. Just as E-A-S-Y—" He grinned, snatching Annie into his arms and waltzing 'round the kitchen. "Guess somebody'll have a locket and chain out of this!"

"Bernie," said Annie tentatively when they were seated at the table later. "Is it perfectly all right to take those—those fliers? Perfectly *safe*?"

"Sure it is! Good Lord, all the fellows that work in the 'Street' do it. I know chaps that pay their rent on what they make in pools."

Annie said no more. Bernie bought her the locket and chain and the world went smilingly on.

She felt the relaxation of poverty's pinch. For the first time in her lean little life she felt real happiness, the happiness not only of loving and being loved, but of earning what she had, making full return to life for what life offered her. She was helping Bernie, too, making it more easily possible for him to succeed. She was helping her mother. She was making her sister's and her little brother's lives more livable than her own had ever been. She remembered back to the halcyon years when her father had earned \$18 a week and they lived in a nice flat west of Third Avenue, and she knew such joyous days—for a while.

This was better. How infinitely better even than that!

Then came the message, borne by a wee small voice, afar off. There was to be a baby! Here was something that would be *all* her own. Not "rented," like the bridal clothes. But her very own, a part of her to keep always. . . .

## CHAPTER XXIV

### LIFE'S DRAMA UNFOLDS

ANNIE went on with her daily life just as if the miracle were not happening. She got up early — rather an effort, too, it was some days — prepared breakfast, dressed herself in her neat business clothes, pinned on her small hat and started out like thousands upon thousands of other stenographers. But always before she left the house (Bernie usually went earlier, his duties taking him for errands to the postoffice and elsewhere before he appeared at the office) she would smile at herself in the mirror.

"You lucky, lucky girl!" she whispered, looking happily into her own eyes. "You're different from the others! You've got a secret — such a wonderful, *wonderful* one —" The phrase would end on a little thrilling catch of the breath.

It pleased her not to mention it to any one for the time being. She had had so few joys that she hugged this to her hungrily. She had a fantastic notion that she would have hidden it from the Great Director of life itself if possible, for fear some strange perversity of fate might wrest her rapture from her.

This was HERS. Of course the joy of it was Bernie's too. Yet what man ever felt the subtle, all-pervading, self-effacing rapture that a woman who really wants her baby, feels at the annunciation of motherhood? There was plenty of time to tell Bernie. It wouldn't seem quite so sacred and marvelous when he and the others knew, and got fussy about her, and she had to quit the office and sit home and sew, and enter the more graceless stages of it all. Meanwhile she dare have her secret garden of delight

whence to withdraw from the world and dream her dreams.

The practical side was important, too. Annie was steadily adding to their hoard. In a few months the furniture installments would be paid up and there would be clear sailing ahead.

It was spring. One soft night Bernie suggested that they go up to the boat club and "look things over."

"The season'll soon be on full swing, Nan. Let's have a glance at the boats. We can ride up on the surface car and get some air, it's so mild."

Annie loved the boat club almost as much as Bernard did. It had framed her first real glimpse of clean pleasures and romance. Besides, the river, the lights, the fresh air and the comradely bustle of the place never ceased to allure her.

When they got there Bernie led the way to the dark room near the water level where the skiffs and shells, the canoes and rowboats were stored.

There was a close, tarry, painty smell about everything, suggestive of the season's wakening activities.

"Come on, Nan, what do you say to our taking a little row up as far as the bridge and back? All right—fine! Lend me a hand with this skiff, will you, matie? That's the ticket. Now shove her off a little—oh, she's stuck, wait a second, I'll pull at this end. There! Now can you ease her down—so! Hop in; I guess we can do without cushions this time. Nobody seems to be in the locker room."

Annie scrambled in, steadied by Bernie's hand, and settled down thankfully on the cane seat near the stern. The long ride up and the exertion with the boat had made her feel a little giddy and queer. They pushed out into the smooth river and the fresh May air blew revingly over her damp forehead. But she didn't feel talky.

"I say, Nance, I've been thinking about vacation. Let's both get away the last of August and go on a canoeing trip for two weeks. I know a dandy route. It'll mean rough-

ing it, but you'll like that, I'll bet. It wouldn't cost much, either. What do you say?"

For a moment Annie made no reply.

"What's the matter — you haven't said a word for ten minutes!" asked Bernie, resting on his oars and peering through the darkness toward his wife's face. "Ain't mad at anything, are you?"

"No, dear, far from it," answered Annie. Something in her tone arrested his attention.

"Well, what's the matter, for heaven's sake?" His voice gathered surprise and impatience with every word.

It must be told now, thought Annie, and here in the dim spring night on the river would be a sweet time and place. Bashfully and haltingly she imparted her secret and waited, her eyes starry-bright, for his answer.

"No!" Bernie shouted. "You don't mean it! Well, for God's sake!"

It was not the ideal response, but Annie made allowance for his surprise.

"But you're glad, aren't you, Bern? *I* am — terribly, terribly glad!"

He was silent, rowing fast. As they crossed a gleam of light from an open boathouse door Annie could see upon his face a look of — what was it, annoyance? Disappointment? Annie repeated, "You're glad, aren't you?" her spirits a little quenched.

"Well, it busts up the whole trip, doesn't it?"

"I couldn't go," faltered Annie.

How she longed for him to say, "Darling girl! What do we care about canoe trips! It's wonderful — I never was so happy!" But he was silent and rowed jerkily, his mind elsewhere, while Annie with heavy heart was groping for answers to a hundred doubts and fears. Bernie turned round presently and rowed back to the clubhouse.

As he helped Annie from the skiff and saw the troubled look in her eyes he felt suddenly ashamed and contrite. He swept her into his arms and kissed her.

"I'm a beast," he whispered. "A selfish pig of a fellow! It was the surprise of it, Nan — why didn't you tell me sooner? Glad? Of course I'm glad. Proud's a peacock! We'll have to hustle round and give the little shaver a jim-dandy welcome!"

Annie snuggled to him as they leaned against the rough board wall of the boathouse, holding tight to his coat, her face hidden upon it. Everything was all right now. She felt a bit hysterical and wobbly, but quite happy again. And they went home saying little, but in a gentle, sympathetic mood.

Two weeks later Annie gave up her place at the office and devoted her whole time and strength to the little house and preparations for the little third party who would soon be reigning over it. Bernie was attentive and kind. He helped her with the dishes nights and brought her flowers and little parcels of fruit. After supper he sat by the open window with his newspaper or together they went up onto the roof with camp chairs and cushions if it was very warm.

Annie viewed the universe through maternal eyes now. She looked at Bernie and thought how boyish he seemed, then she would urge him to go to the boat club for an evening or Saturday afternoon. He always protested, but always went. And once, at Annie's plea, joined the fellows in a camping trip for a week-end and a Monday holiday that followed it.

"There's a peach of a chance," he said on his return from this jaunt, "to clean up a bunch of cash on Cadmium Common. All the chaps that were in the camping party are in on it. Safe as a church and clean as a whistle. Say, Ann —" as Annie went quietly on with her sewing without replying. "Ann, we've got quite a little wad saved, haven't we?"

"Something," said Annie from her rocking chair, which went on with a brisker motion.

"How much?"

"Well, I saved about a hundred and seventy-five while I was working. And you've got a little, too. Why?"

"Listen, Nance. If we put \$200 in this pool we'll make forty or fifty *easy*. Why don't we? There isn't any risk at all, and it'd be nice — for the little feller!"

Annie rocked on, a slight pucker between her eyes.

"But if it shouldn't —"

"Now, don't say that," interrupted Bernie, coming behind her and pinching her ears affectionately. "I tell you it's as sure as shooting."

He felt it *was* sure. Perhaps Bernie Carroll had a little keener faculty for believing things he wanted to believe than most people. At all events, he convinced his wife that it would be foolish "to let such a chance go."

They drew their "wad" from the savings bank and Bernie put it into the pool, all eagerness and confidence. He had made \$75 before. He would do it again. Annie was not so hopeful. But she attributed her doubts to her generally nervous state, and said nothing. She was taxed to the utmost these days to preserve any sort of calmness. The egotism that is a part of the approach to motherhood gripped her. Her own immediate problems blurred the vision of everything else. The world revolved about her and her miracle, now so near.

Bernie came home one night a little late, to find Annie ill and Aunt Margaret there. It was a muggy night in September, following a long hot spell that had frazzled everybody's nerves. Aunt Margaret was fanning Annie, who lay on a couch that had been moved near the window, feeding her little bits of ice from a bowl, and smoothing back the damp hair from her forehead. Bernie kissed her, hugged Aunt Moggie and looked at her questioningly.

"It's all right, boy," she reassured him. "Just the heat and a bit of a faint spell. You sit here a while and I'll run into the kitchen and fix your supper."



"Look at *that!*" she whispered, indicating with her happy eyes a small bundle of blue blanket near her.

Across the narrow apartment court a woman was singing. A parrot in a cage on a windowsill screeched fiendishly. Bernie felt like killing it. He was in a savage mood, and life looked dark to him.

He ate his supper in silence. The flat stifled him and he went for a walk. When he got back, an oldish woman opened the door.

"I'm the nurse, sorr," she said briefly, and instantly Bernie sensed the air of subdued busyness and suspense that had so suddenly come to fill his small home. He heard a man's voice — the doctor — and Aunt Margaret's low replies as she moved about, quiet and efficient.

There seemed no place for Bernie and the load of fear and gloom he carried. The parrot still squawked piercingly across the airshaft. A piano was jangling a popular tune somewhere. Who cared about the Carrolls and their tragedies and their pain?

Toward midnight Aunt Margaret begged Bernie to go out again for a few turns round the block. "It'll be better for all," she urged. And Bernie, sick at heart and numb with apprehension, went.

When he returned he felt without any one telling him, that the miracle had happened. A feeble squeak — Could that be the cry of a human creature launched newly into life? And for whom he was responsible? That white little face on the pillow — Could that be Annie, his girl, his wife? So much frailer than he, yet a triumphant pilgrim through a more terrible journey than he could ever know!

He rushed to the bedside and buried his face in the coverlet.

Annie reached out a hand and patted his shoulder feebly.

"Look — at THAT!" she whispered, indicating with happy eyes a small bundle of blue blanket near her.

Bernie could not tell her, or any one, that Cadmium Common had slumped, and their money had been wiped out.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A BLOW FALLS

FOR weeks after the baby's birth Annie had a queer feeling of having been out of the world. That superbly terrible experience bedimmed the little affairs of life. She couldn't quite remember the details of that hot September day just before the Miracle of tiny Rob had happened. She did recall Bernie kneeling at the bedside, his face buried, his shoulders heaving. She supposed it was because he feared her getting lost in the Valley of Shadows. But now, as she thought of it, there seemed something else besides anxiety for her safety in his nerve-racked tremulousness.

Since that night he had been wondrously kind and tender toward her. He had always been good. But there seemed a new something — As Annie did her housework she kept groping about in her mind for a memory that always eluded her, yet hung about just out of reach and beckoned.

Bernie's old grandma, now living with a sister who gladly maintained her for the help she gave, was having a spell of sickness. Annie wanted to visit her and take some flowers. The thought of flowers suggested money. The thought of money recalled to mind the "something" that had escaped her recollection. The pool! The money Bernie was going to make in Cadmium Common. He had not spoken of it since. What could that mean, except failure? Still — maybe the results were not yet known and he didn't want to talk of it until he could report his winnings.

When Annie came home in the afternoon from her brief outing — Robbie's first, all done up in his creamy corduroy coat and tiny bonnet, with the veil over his pinky face; what

a lamb he looked! — the janitress said there had been a "telephone call" from a Mr. Simms, and would she please "telefome" him at the address she knew?

Annie gave Rob to the janitress to hold, and called the office at once from the telephone in the lower hall of the flathouse, a vague fear clutching at her.

"It's only this, little lady," said old man Simms when she at last got him on the wire, "I want you to influence that young spaldeen of yours to quit this fooling round with stocks. He don't get in deep, of course, and he's a good boy. I just don't want him to get the habit. I've spoken to him. I've told him that if I ever get wind of his going into pools again with those young hangers-on in the Street he'll lose his job.

"I don't want that to happen, specially on your account. But I give you fair warning, if he does it again he's going to get fired. It's up to you to give him some straight talk."

"Yes, Mr. Simms, I'll be sure and give him the message"—the janitress was listening curiously—"and thank you!"

Annie assumed a pleasant smile, as if she had received some casual word about extra work, or an errand her husband was required to do, took wee Robbie from the arms of the too-interested janitress and climbed the stairs to her rooms, feeling as if her feet were treading deep sand and her knees weighted with ball and chain.

She felt sure now that Cadmium Common had turned out disastrously and that their little nestegg was gone. But the distress of that was nothing compared to her fear of Bernie's losing the good will of old man Simms. Simms was a good friend and a bad enemy. Annie knew he meant to fulfill his threat if Bernie persisted in his foolishness. And then . . . She dared not pursue the thought.

"What became of that pool you put our savings in, Bern?" Annie asked him that night after supper.

She watched him closely and saw the start, the sudden

tightening of his hands upon his newspaper, the muscles of his lean jaw play as he shut his teeth tightly.

" You needn't answer, Bernie," said Annie in a quiet tone, as he kept silence, fumbling in his mind for the best presentation of the case. " It's hard to lose the money. But it'll be a lesson to us, won't it? Promise me, dear, on your word of honor, we'll never go into anything like that again — not for anything — not under any circumstances. Promise."

Annie went up to him and put both hands against his cheeks. When he still did not speak she repeated, " Promise me! " emphasizing the syllables with little moves of his head from side to side and a hastening pat or two.

Bernie reached up, took hold of her wrists and drew her down on his lap. He had recovered himself, and now spoke frankly and earnestly, holding her against him affectionately.

" Listen, Nance. Cadmium Common was the first one of these things that ever went wrong. It made me sick, thinking of how our money — specially your little wad — was wiped out. And coming just when it did — while you were needing everything comfortable and nice. I tell you I kicked myself a million times. But it was just a piece of bum luck, Nan. There ain't a bit of use crying over spilt milk. The thing to do is to buy more milk."

Annie wrenched herself free from his arms and jumped up.

" Bernard! "

" Why — what's the excitement? You act as if you'd been shot."

" Bernard! " Annie ignored his interjection. " You'd never, never as long as you live, think of doing that again, would you? "

" Nan, don't act like a kid! I know more about this thing than you do. I ain't a hare-brained fool. I ain't trying to clean up a fortune without working. I'm going

to keep my job, and take care of you and the little chap. All we fellows want is to break even. We ain't going into this as a regular thing. But there are a few perfectly safe investments a fellow can go into in a small way and get his money back. That's all we want to do — get our money back, and then *quit*. I promise you I'll do that."

Annie regarded him soberly. His earnest manner, his confidence, reassured her a little. She knew he *was* good — kind and hard-working and "steady," as the phrase went. The shock of the telephone message from Simms had worn off a little. Still — she must be doubly sure Bernie would do nothing rash, nothing to imperil his position with the chemical company.

"There's something else," she said; "old Mr. Simms called me up to-day, Bern. He's heard about those pools, and he doesn't like it one bit. He told me I must keep you from ever going into anything like that again. He says he'll fire you right straight off if he ever gets wind of anythink of the sort again."

Bernie's eyes narrowed. This news surprised him.

"Huhmf —" he breathed impatiently, "somebody's blabbed. Well —" after a little pause, "don't you worry. Leave this to me. It's my affair and I know where I get off. I'm not going to be bit twice. You trust me, don't you, Nancie?"

Annie looked at him, her eyes very sweet in their new maternalness. She loved Bernie and he loved her. It is difficult for Old Age's hard, dry warnings (especially over a telephone) to compete with Youth's confident hope. Abstractly Annie knew Simms was right. Concretely there was her young husband before her, smiling boyishly, reaching out to grasp her, reassuring her so plausibly, asking if she "trusted" him.

"Yes, dear, I trust you," she said, "but I just want you to promise me you won't try again — not even 'to get the money back.' Let the money go. We've got enough to do

with. I can manage gloriously on your twenty-two, and there's only one more installment on the furniture. Promise, won't you, Bern — to please me?"

A little wail sounded from the bedroom. Without pause Annie turned and flew to her son. Bernie went back to his newspaper with a breath of relief. He had not been required to "promise." Women were silly, sentimental beings, anyhow, bless them. He turned to the financial news and was soon deep in its columns. Annie, in the other room, was soothing and patting her baby, adjusting his troubles, whatever they were, rearranging the mysterious pins and bands of his subattire, forgetting her financial problems in her one great beautiful mother problem, unmindful that the business of the promise had been left unfinished.

Days and weeks of happy housewifery flew by. Now and then she was stabbed with remembrance of the lost savings fund. But what she now had was so much more than she had ever known in her life that the everyday joy of keeping her flat, of loving and tending her baby, of passing a friendly word with the neighbors, going to market, deciding whether the corned beef or the chuck steak would be most economical, puckering her brow over the expensive luxury of a salad with olive oil to dress it — all this was so captivating, so heart-filling and delightful, that the fact of having or not having a nestegg in the savings bank was a remote and paltry consideration.

She managed her household with care and good judgment — the old tenement days had served her well as a school of domestic economy. Annie often thought of them as she tied on Robbie's bonnet, buttoned him into his coat and wheeled him proudly out in the folding go-cart.

Robbie was a sturdy baby, straight and strong. He had never known the dank air of the east side tenements, never had to get his sunnings on the "garbage dock," as Annie had. Ah, how much better off she was now, she thanked God reverently. And Janie, the baby of tenement days,

was now a prospering young milliner of seventeen, earning her fair wage, enjoying youth's fair share of gayeties. Life was good, thought Annie!

One evening Bernie came home looking tired and ill. He had a headache, he said, and would go to bed early.

Annie made him some special tea, smoothed back his hair and looked at him with anxious willingness to "do something."

"No, it's nothing," said Bernie. "It's the spring fever, I guess. Head aches. Been feeling rotten all day. Don't bother. I'll turn in. I want to get up early in the morning."

He did get up early, dressed with special care and left the house betimes, "feeling fine," he said.

That evening Aunt Moggie happened in for dinner. She usually came Sundays, seldom during the week.

"Why, you old darling!" greeted Annie. "Bless you for being a surprise party. We've got a horrid dinner — just stew and a salad. I'll send Bernie out for a pie as soon as he shows his face; he hasn't come home yet. Sit down, dear, and hold fattie Rob. Give me your things."

It was not till Annie got through bustling about that she noticed the worried look on Aunt Margaret's face. But when Annie asked if anything was wrong she reassured her. She just thought she'd come up for a ride on the open car. It had been stuffy at the office.

Then Bernie came in, kissed Annie, tossed the baby and patted Aunt Moggie's shoulder. His keen look told him that Margaret, seeing Annie had heard nothing, had left the news for him to impart. He could put it off no longer. As soon as dinner was over he went behind Annie's chair and put his arms round her, holding her so she couldn't turn round.

"Don't be scared, Nance," he said in a low, steady tone, "but old man Simms has given me the blue envelope. Yes-

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terday. Now — now —" as Annie, terrified, tried to get out of her chair. Aunt Margaret had stolen from the room and was sitting in the parlor with the baby.

"It's all right, Nannie, nothing to worry about. He's a crotchety fellow, Simms is. But every kick is a boost, and I've been looking up things all day. I'm pretty sure of landing something even better than Simms's to-morrow morning."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE UNSPECIALIZED MAN

ANNIE walked to the car with Aunt Margaret. Each tried to keep the other from knowing how the loss of Bernard's position affected her. Margaret Bailly's life and her observation of others' lives had not left her an ardent optimist. She looked with mature, sad eyes upon a situation which might be fraught with both good and evil, but must certainly hold some hardship.

If Bernie got his new place quickly his family would not suffer keenly *then*. But there was the risk of the lesson not sinking in. On the other hand, if he did not "land a job" as he so confidently expected, no one could foresee results. It might mean more than privation to him and Annie and the little chap. It might mean he would lose heart. And that, mused Aunt Margaret as she and Annie walked along rather silently, is perhaps the worst punishment suffered by the jobless man.

She liked Bernie and had much sympathy for him. She knew youth's instinct to "take a chance." She knew the lure of "easy money" to the average human.

That Bernard had taken his "chance" and lost was not proof of unstable character. She had seen men do foolish things before — and then stop doing them. She had seen girls slip from what is called the path of rectitude and later recover firm footing and walk forward into useful, happy lives. It was what Bernie did with his experience that counted. They must wait and see. Meanwhile she had come that night to Annie's to comfort her and uphold her courage if need be.

Annie was shocked, but not unduly. She had high confidence in her young husband. What hurt most was the ignominy of dismissal.

"Just how did it happen, Aunt Mog?" she asked at last. "Did Bern go into another of those pool things?" She thought with a pang of how she had been diverted from getting his promise not to.

"He tried to, dear. Wind of it got to old Mr. Simms and he was very angry. Gambling happens to be one of the things he is rabidly opposed to. If it had been anything else, I think he would have given Bernard another chance. As it was, Simms told me the only way to cure a boy of the habit is to frighten him thoroughly. I wish, dear," Aunt Moggie added, "you'd talk to Bernard seriously about this."

"Oh, indeed I will, darling!" They had reached the car line. Annie put her aunt aboard with an affectionate boost, smiling and waving good-night as the car moved off.

Was her aunt's face paler and thinner than usual, or did she just imagine it? Annie asked herself. A flash of memory brought back that day when Aunt Margaret had been replaced at her publishing house by a younger woman, and Annie had first noticed with a shock and a sense of uncanniness the streaks of silver in the hair, the lines in the loved face that time had traced. She went home subdued and vaguely fearful.

Annie and Bernard talked till late that night. Annie pleaded well and wisely, stopping just short of the "I-told-you-so" rebuke, knowing instinctively how it goads a man to fury. She wanted to encourage Bernie, not nag him. Besides, he was so sure of getting that other job "tomorrow."

"A fellow I know spoke for me," said Bernie, "and I'm sure to land the job. He says they'll pay from twenty-five to thirty. I tell you it's a bad idea to stay too long in one place. You get in a rut. Now, if I get this job to-

morrow —” He talked on, inspiring Annie with his own confidence, and they finally fell asleep with unoppressed minds.

The next morning Bernard started off sprucely to keep his appointment where “the fellow” had spoken for him. When he reached there he found the manager was out. He waited a long time. Other young men kept coming in and taking seats, also evidently waiting for the manager. Gradually Bernard’s enthusiasm waned. The impressive little talk he had rehearsed in his mind dwindled in vitality, and by the time he was summoned he had to force into his bearing a show of personality and capacity for the job.

Somehow he had not calculated on the man asking him minute particulars as to how he left his last position. The friend who had “spoken for him” gave Bernie the impression that he could “walk right into this job” and that it exactly “fitted him.”

He stumbled around the answers regarding his departure from Simms & Orcutt. The manager looked at him deprecatingly, which did not add to the boy’s ability to pick up confidence and make a good showing.

“We’d have to have the best of references,” he said. “It’s a responsible place, with prospects. If we pay twenty dollars we must have the right young man to start with.”

“I — I thought the salary was twenty-five to begin.” Bernie’s surprise made him utter the remark without thinking. “I understood —”

“Well, son, you understood wrong,” cut in the manager, whose finger was already touching his electric call-button. “Leave your name and address with the boy outside. We’ll let you know.”

Bernie left the place feeling much reduced in confidence. The idea of his friend telling him the salary was “twenty-five to thirty”! And there was no exclusiveness about the job at all. The people had apparently advertised the vacancy, or else why should all those other fellows be there?

He was disgusted, and went to think it over at a dairy lunch-room. While he was finishing his baked apple and crullers he picked up a discarded newspaper and glanced at the want advertisements.

Beginning at the A's, his eyes ran quickly and discardingly down through "Automobile body-makers," "Automobile drivers," "Automobile varnish rubbers," "Automobile course complete, \$35," "Airplane mechanics for government work," "Awning hangers"; then "Bakers on fancy cakes," "Barbers"—lots of barbers. Barbers were needed wholesale. Bernie almost wished he had training as a barber, the wages sounded so promising. And "Bootblacks, \$15 and tips"! More bootblacks. "Boilermakers, 50 first-class men needed, double pay for overtime." He wasn't even a boilermaker! "Boys wanted" filled a column. Carpenters, chauffeurs, cigar salesmen, coal passers, collectors, conductors, cutter on coats and vests, deckhands, diemakers and draftsmen, drivers, electricians, elevator men—everything seemed needed but what Bernie was. No one appeared to need an office clerk.

For the first time, Bernie Carroll realized how unspecialized his training had been. He had felt so sure of his place at Simms & Orcutt's. His work had seemed so definite. Why hadn't some one made him a machinist or bricklayer? He thought of his poor grandmother. She had done her best to bring him up. She had been very proud that he was a clerk in a nice office.

He put the paper in his pocket, and when he had paid his check and got into the street he entered a hallway and tore out several advertisements that sounded possible. He tramped around all afternoon from one to another, finding nothing. Either the place had been filled or the work demanded experience he had not, or the pay was too small to support his family. Bernie got home long past six, weary and dashed in spirit. Annie saw it and affected a cheeriness she did not feel.

" Didn't the job your friend told you about pan out?" she asked, as she briskly cleared the table.

" No. It wasn't what Bill said at all. Only twenty a week and — and not my kind of work anyhow."

" Now, isn't that always the way!" exclaimed Annie, hiding her gathering fears under a hearty manner. " People get your hopes all up, and then when you investigate everything's different. Well, don't you care, Bern, you can get something on your own hook. Answer ads."

Bernard " answered ads " the next day, starting early. Wherever he went there were ten times as many fellows as there were jobs. The world seemed filled with competitors. The few places Bernie could have got offered starvation pay, and when he demurred he was invariably told " they could get plenty of help at that price." Take it or leave it. Bernie remembered how often he had heard it said that any ablebodied man who really wants work can find it. He laughed derisively. He knew better now.

Day after day he kept trying, his wife playing well her part of helpmate and encourager. The little she had scraped together from Bernie's salary, intending it as a " clothes fund " for themselves and the baby, was soon exhausted. Aunt Margaret gently proffered aid, but Annie resolutely declined it, saying Bernie would get work — she knew he would.

Weeks passed, with the situation beginning to grow desperate. With so much walking Bernard's shoes wore out. Annie noticed them one night after he had gone exhaustedly to sleep, and cried over them. The soles of both were worn clean through, making a pathetic contrast to the carefully polished uppers. She looked at his other clothes.

There were the heart-stabbing signs of poverty — the frayed cuffs and trousers, the shirt faded from innumerable washings, the broken collar, the shine of the coat at elbow and shoulder.

The next day Annie went out and pawned the locket and

chain Bernie had bought her from his first pool winnings. She rolled up ten dollars of the twelve she had got on it and stuck it under his dinner plate with a note that said: "Shoe and shirt money! Yes, darlint, I'm still a honest woman! I saved it outer my past allowance!" She thought the tiny jest would help keep things cheery.

Bernard hugged her, keeping his face from her view.

"I'm going to get something to-morrow," he said later, his jaw set hard. "It may not be as good as before, but I'll land something or — or — well, I'll *land* it, that's all!"

Bills were piling up. The rent was overdue. Annie talked to the groceryman and to the collector. Both of them looked at her anxious young face with something of sympathy in their eyes, and promised to "wait a little."

She had a new silk dress that she had scarcely worn. She took that to the man with whom her locket was pledged. He held it to the light, felt of it, creased the fabric, wet it with his thumb and finger and shook it at arm's length, reflectively.

"Three and a half," he said briefly, looking at Annie over steel-rimmed spectacles.

A thin woman waiting by the counter with a clumsily wrapped bundle nudged her and murmured behind her hand, "Ask for more; he'll give it!" But Annie couldn't. The dark, ill-smelling shop repelled her. She longed to get out and home to her sleeping baby lest something might have happened him in her absence. She waited nervously for the slow old pawnbroker to make out the ticket with a pen that spluttered and ink diluted with vinegar, took the money he gave and hurried from the place. The thin woman looked after her sympathetically.

"Mebbe she'll learn by and by," she said to another shawled customer.

"Hope to Gawd she don't!" said the latter. They, poor sodden victims of poverty and rapacity, had both "learned."

That evening Bernie came home with a job. It was a

position as shipping clerk in a chemical house something like Simms's and the wage was fourteen "to start."

Annie hugged him and skipped around the little living room. The baby woke and his mother grabbed him in her arms. "Your dad's splendid, Robsie! Go tell him congratulations!" And she stuffed the infant into Bernie's arms, so that the pudgy wee body hid both their faces from each other.

"It's a — a rotten job, Nan — and you such a wonder!" said Bernard incoherently. Annie, understanding well his tribute, countered cheerily:

"What have I got to do with it? I wouldn't know how to 'clerkship' or 'shipclerk' if my life depended on it! Now, sir — let us dine!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### BACK AMONG THE TENEMENTS

THE adversity which now bulked upon the horizon of the Carrolls affected each in a different way. Annie's optimistic eyes viewed any job at all as a mercy and a reason for rejoicing. Instantly her mind flew to the evolution of ways and means of making Bernie's fourteen dollars do the work twenty-two dollars had done before.

The thought of redoubled effort acted upon her as a stimulus. She was eager to get at the tearing-down, building-up process. She was deeply concerned as to results. But she was not bowled over and rendered hopeless by a blow she regarded *only* as a blow, a temporary setback, something that hurt, but you could recover from.

To Bernard the loss of his job, the diatribe against gambling to which he had been treated by old man Simms on the day of dismissal (and of which he told Annie nothing), the difficulty of finding work and the humble job he had been forced to take, all tended to dishearten him. Compared to Annie's, Bernard's life had been an easy one. It had been no great struggle for him to get his little share of success. He had lived poorly, but Gran'ma Carroll had contrived to make a little go far.

There had been but the two of them. There had been none of the struggle for food and rent and shoes for active childish feet, and clothes for a quartet of backs that the Hargans had known. Bernie had been just a shade spoiled. First by his affectionate grandmother, then by the sociable neighbors (most of New York's sociability is confined to the tenements), who admired "the fine blue eyes of him,

his sturdy back and the straightness of them legs, now will you look!" And, when he was older, by admiring girls.

At school he had got on well enough. No one had suggested the effort of high school or the necessity for trade school. And when he was offered a place as "useful boy" in a neighborhood store old Mrs. Carroll was well pleased and the priest at the Church of St. Something, on their corner, patted his head and said, "He's a good lad. He'll make you proud of him one of these days."

She had been very proud, indeed, when he got his job with old man Simms. Simms liked him, raised his wages, commended his industry. Any girl in the office would have smiled on Bernie. He had liked Annie best and Annie had appreciated him from the beginning, loved him, helped him with a thousand diversions and encouragements through the long time of waiting for their marriage. And had made him happy since, even to giving him a healthy, sweet-tempered baby son.

Bernie had not yet learned the real lesson of hardship.

He not only did not like it on his own account now, but he felt belittled and shamed at having to make his family suffer.

Annie saw all this. But the point that stood out was the fact that Bernie had learned his lesson on "gambling." It was characteristic of Annie to place this in the foreground of her thoughts.

With cheery zest she set about finding cheaper quarters, for of course it was now out of the question to live in the uptown flat. There was still one payment due on the furniture and a few bills to settle with tradesmen and landlord.

When she told Bernie she had found rooms, he looked at her with self-accusing glumness.

"But they're nice rooms," she hastened brightly. "Right near mother, too, Bern. Mother isn't so well. I've been thinking, anyhow, that we were a bit far uptown. I know the neighborhood down there. We'll feel at home in

no time, dear. Three sunny rooms — really nice, Bern! You'll save time mornings, too."

"We could stay on here, Ann," he answered, his arm around her shoulder pleadingly. "I'm not going to stick at this job long, blest if I am! We could make out a little while. The superintendent at our place is an awful good fellow. I'm going to get in with him. I feel pretty sure he can put me onto something better."

"You'll find something better, all right," said Annie confidently. "In the meantime it won't hurt to cut expenses. Anyhow, I've engaged the moving man. Now come to supper. Here's your favorite dish — beefsteak pie — and some magic coffee, a present from Aunt Mog."

Annie's mind was made up on the moving situation. She would take no risk of heavy living expenses. She would see there was no extra temptation to "get in" with influential superintendents and fellows in "the Street," though she felt certain *that* ghost was laid. She kept the talk in other channels.

"You know, Bern, Aunt Moggie isn't looking a bit well. I'm worried about her."

"She works too hard," said Bernie, enjoying his pie and coffee in spite of himself. "Old Simms is an awful hard man to work for, I tell you. He's all for making a dollar, no matter how he sweats the people that work for him. If you make one slip, he's off you for keeps. He's hard. I suppose if he wasn't he wouldn't be worth half a million to-day. I tell you business is no softie's game. You gotta be *flint*. They're all the same."

Annie thought of her factory days and of what a paradise Simms's office seemed by contrast.

"He was mighty decent to me," she said.

"Sure he was," assented Bernie, passing his cup for more coffee. "You were young and good-looking and a hustler. You had all the modern ways of doing things. It's different with your Aunt Margaret. She's slow and old-fashioned."

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You forget how long she's been at this shorthand game. She seems to tire her quick as a winkle if she made a mistake or forgot something, or had a spell of sickness."

"Well, now, Bernie."

Annie changed the subject quickly, talking of Bernie's law, how things went with him, what sort of men his associates were, the certainty of his ability being recognized, the fact he had shown by getting the job at all seeing how bad times were, and of how much easier it is to "get a job now a day" instead of finding one when you had nothing. Under the influence of dinner and coffee and cheery talk, Bernie soon felt that things might be worse, even if they did have to move downtown "temporarily."

After supper he played with Robsie a while — he was as proud of Robsie "as if he'd had him himself," as Annie once laughingly told her mother — and then set about getting up a barrel from the janitor and packing it with dishes and the few precious "ornaments" Annie had been given as wedding presents. Annie maintained a stoutly cheerful air, lest her young husband lose heart on the moving proposition. But by dint of womanly tact and much toil which was womanly in spirit and manly in muscular effort they got packed and settled in the new home.

It was far from a pangless operation to Annie Carroll. The little clean uptown flat had meant more than just nice rooms. It had stood for a fulfilled dream of life and love. It had sheltered everything intimately bound up with all that brought her joy. The new furniture represented a start toward that goal and blessed shelter for which millions of men and women are working all over the world from early morning till late at night, from youth to age — a home. The pretty things in it were what made it more than a shelter — a thing to love and enjoy and to permit family and friends to enjoy. The baby that had come to it endeared those rooms to Annie because he was what sanctified that home from a mere shelter and social center to

something divine, something immortal, that should go on even after she and Bernie had passed. She and Bern were not, since Robbie's coming, simply a man and woman joined in a sort of partnership. They were now a *family*, and of incalculable importance to the State and to the Future. Who could tell *how* important? How endearingly so!

All this, and more, Annie thought as she went through the commonplace operation of "moving"—dirtying her hands, mussing her pretty hair into a wispy mass that kept loosening and having to be repinned, smudging her face, getting herself so lame and so tired that she would have burst out crying if anybody had "pointed a finger at her."

When in the new place the last smelly van man had gone, the last dish was set away in the cupboard, the last waist and coat was put away in the one skimpy clothes closet, the last picture hung upon the wall, Annie's feelings as she sat down for the luxury of a rest, with Robbie in her lap, were of thankfulness. Had not Aunt Moggie gone secretly and settled with the furniture installment man? Hadn't the clock, the pair of vases, the bedroom rug and some odds and ends of apparel she could do without been pledged behind the door with the three gilt balls (both refuge and bleeding place of the poor!) and enough realized to pay the butcher and the rent man?

They were starting fresh and without debt, thought Annie, her native optimism rising. But one thing saddened her—Bernie would have to quit the boat club. Not only were the yearly dues impossible to manage, but there would be no time to go, no appropriate clothes, no opportunity to return even in the modest way, the friendly "treats" of the young people who were its members. That was hard. For herself Annie didn't mind. *She* had the baby. But for Bernie—

When she thought of the boat club she felt troubled and a little bitter. Bern so loved the taste of athletics he got up there, the gay atmosphere, the decent fellows and girls

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who made up the parties. If he worked all day at his uninteresting job, was it fair that he should have no pleasant recreation in the long summer evenings? She knew what it was to long for diversion, a little life and fun when the grand tour was over. whimsically enough, a remark made once by the janitress at the uptown flat flashed into her mind.

They had been speaking of the rooms in the basement.

"Oh, they're nice rooms," the janitress had assured her. "They look right out onto the street. I *gotter* live in rooms that look onto the street on account of my husband. A woman don't mind so much. She's got her housework and the children. But you know how it is with a man! A man's *gotter* see out. If he can't *see* out, he'll *go* out! Ain't it the truth?"

Annie smiled. Yes, it was true, she guessed. If there were only some way Bernie could keep on with the club. Think of all the great unoccupied houses of the rich along the Hudson and on Riverside Drive. They had noted them as they canoed by. Millions of dollars' worth of luxury that nobody used except for a few weeks at a time. Health and joy for the poor that the poor had no possible access to!

A stirring from Robbie and a commanding cry for his dinner roused Annie from her thoughts. The bitterness disappeared. At least she had Robsie. And at least there was sunlight in their three small rooms and a vacant lot behind! Maybe there was an athletic club or gymnasium in the neighborhood for Bern.

She was back again among the tenements. But at least now she had *some* precious possessions to make life sweet.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### POVERTY'S PINCH

THE Carrolls' little flat was not a half mile from where Annie had lived most of her meager childhood. It was in East Sixteenth Street, near the river. Annie chose it because the windows of two rooms, the living room and kitchen, looked southward over an unbuilt-on acre, which the caretaker said "belonged to the city."

It was an ugly bit of land, unkempt and disfigured with rusty cans, old shoes, sodden wads of what had once been articles of dress, broken bottles and a few defunct wagon wheels whose spokes lay prone and bleaching like the bones of cattle in a desert waste.

But the space let in the sun and air, even if it did smell of gas houses when the wind was from their direction. And you could hear boat whistles. Annie loved boat whistles. They suggested far-off, mysterious places, and the restfulness of the sea. The sound of a factory whistle was hateful; of a boat whistle delicious.

For their three rooms the Carrolls paid \$12 a month. It was a higher rate, considering advantages, service and cubic feet of air, than was demanded for apartments near the homes of the rich.

There was, of course, no bath, for it was one of the old type "cold water flats." Water for bathing was heated on the stove in the kitchen, and throughout "the block" the family tub was usually to be seen hanging on a nail outside the tenant's back windows.

Annie could have rented rooms of more modern type. "Model" tenements were just being built, with "outside

stairways," cement floors and good plumbing. But they were all far from the neighborhood she felt at home in, and for every advantage of sanitation there was something undesirable. Sunshine was lacking or else the rental was too high for Bernard's slim wage.

The block was depressing. The tenements on either side were of a uniform, old-fashioned type, with battered doors, usually open, and slattern hallways that were dark and had the composite breath of many cookings, many washings, many sleepings — a smell as characteristic of the tenements as the aroma one sniffs behind the scenes is of the theater, or the faint, cool odor of incense, candle smoke, flowers and leather prayer books, of a church.

There were little shops here and there, smaller and less prosperous than those on the avenues, their wares more wilted, their window displays fly-specked and disorderly.

Annie's neighbors were of pretty much all nationalities. A mile to the south was a solid ghetto. Between that and Fourteenth Street were chiefly Italians. But the East Teens and Twenties were polyglot.

Though she was back in the tenement district of her infancy, Annie regarded her surroundings, her whole situation, from a new and brighter viewpoint. She was still the pawn of circumstance. But the helplessness of childhood no longer weighed her down. She was no longer the victim of the will of other persons, as children always are. She did not have to live in the disorder some one else created. Nor wear the humiliating, poor little frocks fashioned of Uncle George's "samples" that had caused her more suffering in the old days than the grown-ups of her family dreamed. She had not to do this or that irksome task without knowing why. Or wonder and blunder along through a maze of happenings and obligations that were all more or less a mystery to her childish mind.

She was free now in a measure. She had love. The baby that lay in her lap, that waked her in the night, that

worried her with threatened illness and was her constant care, was flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. And if the responsibility of tending him was great, so was the joy of the service.

Her home, humble as it was, she could keep as she chose. The money in her purse, little as it was, she could administer. She felt the vague promise of fate-mastership, soul-captaincy. She never for an instant felt sorry her childhood was past. And although she had slipped back into the grip of poverty, she did not feel it was forever, thanks to the optimism inherited from her father.

The immortality of the soul had never been a subject of thought to Annie. But her father's hopefulness, his teachings, his indomitable spirit through failure, through sickness up to death itself, lived on in his daughter. It would be passed on in turn to her son, and again in some measure, more or less, to her son's son. And on, and on. Immortality of the soul? Annie would have said unhesitatingly yes — and unconsciously she would have proved it.

Annie recalled how they had gone on a picnic once to the top of the Palisades, and walking along near the edge, looking down delightedly at the expanse of noble river flowing like a broad satin ribbon far below they had been suddenly halted by an excited bull terrier and an elderly man in golf clothes. In no gentle words the property owner shooed them from the beauty place, the barking animal at their heels.

" You're trespassing on this ground! " cried the man angrily. " Get out of here and stay out! "

They got out. They stayed out.

" That was Wilsey, the 'sewing machine king,' said one of the party as they scrambled out of the way. " He inherited nine millions. He never earned a dollar in his life. Yet he eternally preaches the joys and rewards of work. They say he plays golf every day from 10 o'clock till 4. Gosh, I didn't know we were on *his* grounds! "

Annie thought what a bore it must be to play golf six hours every day. His name "Wilsey" was stamped in gold on every machine in the shirtwaist factory she used to work in. How often she had looked at it and thought how happy and rich the man must be! He didn't look at all happy, now that she saw him. . . .

But that was long ago. Annie knew now that the man was a lonely old dyspeptic and that the reason he wasn't happy was because he had never had anything in his life that interested him except his mild game of golf. She wished she could get hold of a little strip of his idle land right now for Bernie to do athletic stunts on! She smiled and wondered why the recollection of old Wilsey had popped into her mind, with the questions in its train, "Why should Wilsey have all that money he never earned?" "Why didn't Bernie, who worked hard, have enough to pay his boat club fees?" "What made the rich so rich, the poor so poor?"

What troubled her most right now was an item very matter-of-fact and close at hand. She wanted to find something to replace in her young husband's life the pleasures of the Waterwitch Boat Club. She looked out her kitchen window toward the East River and smiled wryly as a picture of New York's downtown waterfronts came to mind.

The Battery was beautiful, but the waters lapping it were as far from the reach of Bernie Carroll and others like him as were the blue waves of the Adriatic. She thought of the Hudson — yes, there were some bathhouses far uptown, from which a person living on the east side, after traveling an hour by various car lines, might bathe in sewage-dimmed waters.

The East River? Annie remembered the "garbage dock" where she had been sunned as a baby. Boys swam off it — naked urchins who dove from the string-piece and were not fastidious in the matter of chips and wrecked tomato crates,

decayed fruit and patches of floating oil. No place there for a canoe or rowboat!

Meantime the sun was shining and she must take little Rob for his outing while she went to market and incidentally scouted through the neighborhood for boat club substitutes. The weather was still wintry, but spring was not far off, and with the first mild days Bernie, she well knew, would begin to long for out-of-doors. She couldn't be too fore-handed if she was to make practical suggestions.

Wheeling Robsie in the go-cart, she walked to Avenue "A" and down to a certain butcher shop, where the proprietor made a practice of laying out dozens of kinds of meat in his window, each one stabbed with a skewer upholding a little sign with the price on it.

Annie stood many minutes before this window figuring the relative cost of one kind or another before going in to buy. Every penny had to be counted now, its purchasing power stretched to the utmost, the possibilities of utilizing the "left-overs" of such food as was bought being painstakingly considered.

While she was deciding whether to buy "fresh chopped meat, only 14 cents, special to-day" or 15 cents' worth of liver to fry with the bacon she had at home, a voice sounded behind her which even in its first words seemed vaguely familiar.

"Well, I should be struck dead if it ain't Annie Hargan!" said the voice with a syllable or two of chuckle following.

Annie wheeled to look into the black eyes and florid face of her old friend, Rose Rothberg, incredibly grown up, incredibly opulent of figure, but with the same wholesome friendliness that made Annie like her years ago, when they were kids and Rosie vowed by the gods of her ancestors she would "keep a delicatessen and candy store" when she grew up, because "eating is something every one's gotta do."

Annie grabbed both her pudgy hands and pumped them up and down.

"And *what* are you doing down here!" cried Rose, whose name was Rothberg no longer, but Mrs. Max Gubin. "I heard you was married and lived *uptown* in a swell flat — what a grand boy you got here, Annie — Oi, I could eat him, such a sugar-lump, hey —" And Rosie, her breath given out with her long, mixed sentence, took a fresh one and chirruped to Robbie, snapping her fat fingers and smiling down close to his puzzled little face.

Annie, proud and pleased, tried to answer all the questions at once.

"I did live *uptown*, Rose, but —" Annie hesitated to mention Bernie's loss of job, "well, things happened and —"

"Ach — trouble, we all got it!" cut in Rosie. "You should know the trouble *we* have! My Max four months in the hospital and the business smashed. Shuh!" And Rose wagged her head expressively.

"So your dream came out, too, did it, Rosie — the delicatessen shop?"

"Huh — yes, it came out —" Mrs. Gubin raised both shoulders and both hands, palms outward, "but it didn't last. That's how dreams do. But," she paused, her head held on one side, eyebrows lifted, mouth drawn down at the corners, "we try again. *Downtown* this time. It's best. Stick with the people you know. *Uptown*, where we was, it's all show and no pay. *Downtown* the people pay *cash*! When my Maxie gets well, this is where we stick!"

They exchanged sympathies and talked in a neighborly way of flats and families and the best shops to patronize and the best ways to keep the babies healthy, there being no parks nor playgrounds nor anything. And that reminded Annie of her errand.

"By the way, Rosie, is there a place around here where

a man who likes athletic things can get a little recreation? Any gymnasium or anything?"

Rose considered; such things were not much in her line.

"There's the new baths," she offered. "You can go swimming there. Only in summer there's such a crowd waiting that they only leave you stay in the water fifteen minutes. Then you got to come out and let the next bunch go. It's all right in the spring, when it ain't so crowded. But in hot weather it's fierce. Oh—" after a pause, "I think there's some kind of a boys' club over in First Avenue near Tenth Street. That's free, but I guess it wouldn't be much for a man. And there's the recreation pier at Twenty-third. There ain't anything else I know of, unless it might be the school in Twentieth Street.

"My oldest boy goes there, and I heard him telling that they got a 'gym' fixed up downstairs and need some one to teach them stunts. Why wouldn't your husband teach the kids and then he could get the use of the place free, yes?"

It was a canny idea, but on her way home Annie mused once more on the pleasures to which the poor had access. She told Bernie that night with all the show of triumph she could muster of the "things to do" she had learned of in the neighborhood. Bernie was not enthused. He had had a hard day and had taken cold standing outside for hours in the raw wind as his work obliged him to do.

"I feel punk, Ann," said he, "I'm going to bed."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE VISE TIGHTENS

**A**NNIE'S re-start into tenement life was made gayly, so to say. She had not in her mind a clear picture of what Bernie's \$14 would buy. The glamor of the uptown flat — tenement though it was, but modern — was still upon her. She dwelt more on having had it than on losing it. It was rather a proof of life's kept promise than the betrayal of hopes. If it *had* existed, it would again, for facts are only viewpoints after all. She was young. Love was still warm. The novelty of marriage, motherhood and housewifery was keen and fresh. Of course, she realized there would have to be strict economies. But there was zest in thrift, satisfaction in making little go far. Besides, she was used to it, and knew how.

She had every intention of keeping a clean, cozy home in her grimy tenement. The dreariness of the street should be shut out. Whatever dirt, whatever confusion of wash-tubs, unmade beds, soiled dishes, littered floors and squawky babies existed in the neighbors' flats, should form no part of her existence. She and Bernie and Robsie would live in a poor but clean and sunny little world of their own.

She was mildly disturbed when Bernie came home from work "feeling punk" from his cold. But it was a wifely pleasure to run to the druggist's on Avenue A and get some quinine, rush back and make a pitcher of steaming lemonade, dose Bernie well, wrap him in their warmest bed things and watch him go off to sleep, murmuring that he'd "sure be O. K. in the morning."

He awoke early next day, saying he was a lot better, and set out as usual for work. There was more standing out in

the wind-scoured street, seeing off the loaded trucks, checking his shipments, correcting the marking of a case of goods here, seeing that a wrong box was hauled off a wagon there, and all the while he kept sneezing afresh and feeling more and more "like the deuce."

He came home with headache and fever, and his cough worse.

"Do let me send for Dr. Kelley," pleaded Annie, clasping anxious hands. "I'm afraid you're getting the grip, Bern. Do you ache all over?"

"Don't go fussing," said Bernie. "I won't have any doctor. All I've got is a bad cold. Just lemme alone and I'll be all right."

He went to work again next day, coughing distressingly, and racked with pain through the lungs. He came home early, and Annie saw by his flushed face and strained look that something more than a mere cold was the matter.

Without waiting for supper he lay down on the couch "for a few minutes' nap." Now thoroughly frightened, Annie flung on her things and went for Dr. Kelley, the old physician who had always been called in when any of the Hargans were sick. His office was six or eight blocks away. When Annie got there she was told the doctor had recently given up practice and gone away.

"But there's Dr. Byron," said the woman who opened the door. "He takes care of the ould docthor's worrk. *He's in, ma'am.*"

Dr. Byron was young and brisk. He agreed to accompany Annie home to have a look at Bernard.

"It's probably only a heavy cold," he said, casually. "Or a touch of grip; there's a deal of it around just now."

When they reached the flat Bernie was not lying on the couch, but standing in the middle of the room, his hair rumpled, his lips apart and a queer light in his eyes.

He started toward them, but lurched against the table so that the dishes, laid for supper, rattled sharply. Righting

himself, he walked forward again, but bumped into the wall. The young doctor steadied him by an elbow and sat him on the couch, looking closely into his face. The baby in the bedroom cried suddenly. Annie started from her trance of anxiety and went to soothe him.

As she held Robbie to her breast, a sudden, terrifying premonition of trouble flashed to her. It lasted but a moment, yet in that moment it was as if a vision of millions of suffering, helpless people passed before her eyes — people whose struggle to live was neither understood nor sympathized with, people who had never had a chance, dirty, unattractive people, ill people, old people, thin babies with big eyes that looked out piteously upon a mystifying world of privation, people with dull faces and work-hardened hands, ragged people, bearded old men and shawled women with faces sorrow-lined. The word "POVERTY" struck upon Annie's ear as though some one had shouted it. "INJUSTICE" followed, hitting her like a blow on the heart. She had always known these things. Yet suddenly a new meaning clothed them, a sympathy and understanding newborn —

Were she and Bernie and Robsie to have a place in that procession of suffering, helpless humans? Was it going to be impossible, for all her good intentions, to keep her home clean and cozy? To keep her loved ones fed and clothed and warm? To keep herself neat and hopeful? To live in a sunny little world of her own, despite the ugliness without? Would *they* be trodden indifferently in the mire under the feet of the prosperous, under the weight of Circumstance that nothing could change — like those people in her vision?

Bewildered, she laid Robsie down and rushed back to the living room. Bernie was lying on the couch, the young doctor sitting on its edge, holding Bernie's wrist with one hand, his watch in the other.

He rose at Annie's entrance and, with a quick glance about the room, said crisply:

" You ought to have seen me sooner. He's been walking around with bad symptoms for days. Get him to bed now. I'll look in in the morning. Meantime have this prescription filled. If he isn't easier to-morrow he'd better go to the hospital. Now — now — don't be frightened. He'll get good care. Everything to do with there, you know." And he took up his hat to go.

" But — but what is it?" Annie managed to ask through dry lips, her hand at her throat.

" Can't say yet. Tell you better to-morrow."

" Is it — pneumonia — tell me, doctor, please."

" Might be, but I can't say. Don't be alarmed. I'll be over in the morning. Good-night."

When he had gone, Annie stared at Bernie, who seemed to have dropped into a doze, though his lips moved and his head turned restlessly on the hard cushion of the sofa. Annie's thoughts yearned to old, slow, kind Dr. Kelley, as much their friend as their doctor. Would *he* so readily have advised the hospital? Would he have taken it all so casually and left her so abruptly and without feeling?

She touched Bernie's face gently. He opened his eyes.

" Come, dear, let's get your clothes off. You'll be so much more comfortable in bed."

" All right," he said. " See that those boxes are marked, will you? The one for St. Louis should have gone long ago. Where the devil's that boy with the stencil?"

Annie pressed her hand to her trembling mouth. She had known illness. Her poor daddy had gone through torments with rheumatism. Her mother had been half invalided for years. But this was her first experience with delirium. It struck her with uncanny, indescribable fear.

Next morning, after a night of fever and restlessness, Bernie was worse. Annie had not slept, her nerves were on edge. Dr. Byron came, looked at Bernie with pursed



The young doctor steadied him by an elbow and sat him on the couch, looking closely into his face.

lips, pushed his eyelid back, counted his pulse and took his temperature.

"Hospital's best," he said in a conclusive tone.

The very word "hospital" struck fear into Annie, as it does to most tenement folk. Half-forgotten incidents of her childhood flashed to mind. Her father had been taken to a hospital. The little child in the next house, who had been run over playing in the street, had gone to the hospital and never come back. The old woman from the flat upstairs had returned from the hospital with harrowing tales of neglect. Along with the "charities" and the "children's society," the "hospital" is a terror to the average poor. Nevertheless they go and many come back.

Bernie went. The doctor said delay would be dangerous, and Annie, bewildered at the suddenness of it all and throbbing with fright, waited while Dr. Byron went to telephone for an ambulance, covered her eyes with cold fingers when they came for Bernard, wrapping him in two gray blankets and lifting him from the bed onto a canvas stretcher with reasonable gentleness and carrying him down the tenement stairs, while doors opened and curious tenants peered out at each landing.

Annie did not see the knot of people gathered round the doorstep — women on their way from market with net-bags bulging, women from nearby flats with shawls hastily thrown about them, idle men smoking pipes, a couple of street cleaners (rare in that block) leaning on their brooms for a look, wide-eyed children pushing past obstructing legs to get in front and see the stretcher with the long, gray-blanketed figure prone upon it being shoved into the waiting vehicle that always means trouble to some one, often disgrace and black tragedy. With human nature's perverse and morbid pleasure, they watched this suggested drama of somebody else's ill luck.

The driver and the surgeon quickly took their places, the horse turned about and galloped down the block toward

First Avenue, with the bell clanging its peculiar r-r-rang-lang-lang-lang that so inevitably turns the head of the passerby.

The knot of onlookers broke up, some with sympathy in their faces; some with mere curiosity, shrugging, asking one another if they knew who it was, or glancing up to the windows of the Carrolls' tenement as if to find answer there.

In two minutes the street presented its usual appearance. The children were back at their noisy play. The men and women returned to their work or their idling. Some one was sick or hurt or dying. That often happened. It couldn't be helped. It was none of their affair. . . . It was forgotten.

Annie decided first to telephone the chemical house where Bernard worked, and went round to the drug store, taking Robsie with her. She found the name in the book, called the number and asked for the manager.

"This is Mrs. Bernard Carroll — the wife of your shipping clerk. Bernard is very ill"—she tried to keep her voice steady—"and has been taken to the hospital. Pneumonia, I think."

The man was kind. Bernard was a good shipping clerk, the most intelligent young man he'd had in a long while. He was making 40 or 50 per cent. on Bernie's wages. It would be impossible to replace him satisfactorily for \$14.

"Why, that's too bad; I'm sorry to hear that!" he said. "I'll send Carroll's pay to you to-day. This is Friday; we'll call it a week. Let me know how he gets along."

Annie thanked him and hung up. It was something to be sure of the \$14, for she had less than a dollar in her purse, and there was the doctor to be paid. Then she walked to her mother's. Mrs. Hargan had been very poorly of late. Annie hated to add to her burdens with this new one. While she was greeting her mother and thinking how best to begin, Mrs. Hargan said: "Well, Ann — seems

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like we're in for more bad luck. Your Aunt Margaret's lost her position at Simms's."

Annie could only gasp "No!"

"Simms got a young girl for her place," went on Mrs. Hargan, her thin voice taking on new hopelessness. "Said Margaret wasn't fast enough. Gave her two weeks' salary and fired her — just like that. Heaven knows what she'll do now. Seems there's nobody wanted in this world soon's they're past the forties. I wish I could be out of the way, too. I'm only a care —"

Annie stopped her mouth with a kiss and turned comforter when she had come as the bearer of ill news. The story of Bernie must wait. She would go to the hospital, and tell the family about him later. Perhaps he would be better. . . .

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE FREE WARD

THE hospital where Bernie lay ill of pneumonia was one of those dreary, overworked, under-serviced institutions where the poor are taken. Wheeling the baby in his gocart, Annie turned in through the gateway to an asphalted courtyard. To the left was the main building, to the right several smaller ones connected by passageways and galleries. As she looked around for the proper entrance a man's voice called behind her. "Hey — where you going? This way in."

She turned. The man was in the doorway of a sort of lodge beside the entrance, and beckoned her to come back. She had gone in through the drive that admitted ambulances. She left Robsie at the door of the small building and went inside. There was a long desk and grating, behind which clerks were writing in big books or on cards and slips, or telephoning, or curtly answering other anxious visitors like Annie.

Some of the callers were foreigners, who got more and more bewildered as the clerks shouted instructions — as if by sheer lung power the meaning should penetrate the alien minds!

"Whojer wanner see?" asked the man behind the desk.  
"My husband, Bernard Carroll." As she said the words Annie felt more desolate, more poor and helpless than ever before in her life.

"Carroll — annywan on the book by the name of Carroll, Jake?" called out the attendant to another, who was turning the leaves of a ledger.

"Carroll, Carroll, les see. J. Carroll, Patrick F. Carroll, Elizabeth, Mary — *Bernard*, that the name?" His finger stopped running down the list. "Yeah, kem in this mornin'. Ward 38, through the court and up them stairs to the left. You can't take the carriage, lady; wanner leave the kid here?" There was a half-bashful kindness in the offer. Some wistful quality in Annie's face evidently touched the case-hardened orderly.

Annie thanked him, but picked up Robbie, who was a substantial load now, and started off in the direction the man pointed. At last she found the right building, the right floor, the right door, outside of which a fat scrubwoman was at work with a slopping pail and rag.

That hospital smell! The faint, sickish odor blended of carbolic and soapsuds, anesthetics, illness and cooking foods. So slight in the corridors of expensive sanitariums, so grossly apparent where the "poor wards" are.

The whimsical thought struck Annie that a blind man might easily smell his way about the city — through the streets where markets were, the various districts devoted to produce, or chemicals, or leather, or flowers — into the tenements, into churches, theaters and the scented homes of the rich.

Of them all, this hospital breath must be the most melancholy, she thought.

The ward distressed her with its none too tidiness, its long row of beds along either wall, holding forlorn men, some pitifully prone, others propped with pillows and looking at her hungrily as she entered, hoping it was some friend.

She found Bernie near the end. On one side of him was a colored man, his head grotesquely bandaged; on the other a poor fellow who kept turning and muttering and plucking at the coarse sheet.

There was no nurse around at the moment. Annie went close to Bernie, whose eyes were shut. He looked so ill that she could have sunk upon her knees and wept in terror.

"He's asleep," offered the negro in the next cot. "Doctor give him somethin'. Says there ain't much to do 'cept leave him rest jes lak that. Ah reckon he ain't so pow'ful bad off," he added comfortingly. "You can set on the baid an' wait a while. Doctor'll be round 'fo long."

Annie was grateful for the suggestion. The doctor would tell her everything. She sat gently down on the foot of Bernie's bed, holding Robbie on her lap. The ward had a desolate look, and the patients in their unironed, unbleached muslin gowns, their faces haggard and unkempt, seemed neglected and miserable enough.

The sloppy scrubwoman came in and began her floor-swabbings down the middle of the room, with a wipe here and there under the cots. At the far end was a male nurse in blemished white duck, sitting at a small table. A sick man in a cheap bathrobe came through a side door, moved slowly to his bed and sank into it heavily. Another sat up suddenly and called for a drink of water. No one paid any attention. He kept on calling.

"They're short o' help," explained the colored man, noting Annie's distress. "The nurse'll get it fer him after while. They ain't never got enough folks around to take care of us right good. It's de free wawd."

He said the last words as if they explained everything. And so they did, thought Annie, beginning to feel hysterical as the man continued to shout for his drink of water. Presently the nurse at the end of the room rose and came down the ward toward him.

"All right, all right," he called out impatiently. "I can't do more than ten things at once." He brought the water, and the half-delirious fellow lay down again, muttering.

Then the doctor came — a boyish person in a clean duck uniform. He walked in briskly, but with a weary air, and started down the aisle. At some beds he stopped a considerable time, reading the record and chart that hung at

the head of each and doing perfunctory things to the patient — taking temperatures, examining, feeling, listening at chests, holding wrists. The nurse accompanied him, putting in a word here and there. Would he *ever* get to Bernie's bed? And yet Annie's heart agonized for some of those others who looked even more ill than her own loved one.

Suddenly Bernard opened his eyes, fever-bright and glassy. He looked at Annie, who got up quickly with Robbie and came to the head of the bed.

"Oh, my dear — speak to me, Bern," she whispered, pressing her hand upon his hot forehead.

"Where — what — Oh, why it's you, Ann," said Bernie, bewildered. Then, as remembrance came back, he went on more steadily. "Why do I have to be here, Ann? It's a devilish place. I hate it. I want to go home and —"

"Hush, dear," she put in gently, "the doctor's coming. I want to ask him all about you. And if it's — it's safe and all right, you shall come home, Bern. Look at Rob — isn't he wonderful? See the color he's got!"

Bernard looked at his little son, but his gaze grew vague and wandered back to Annie.

"They don't treat you right here. No one does anything. I'm all right, I tell you, and I'm going back to work —"

The young interne and the nurse came up, the former nodding perfunctorily to Annie.

"Well, how are we getting along?" he greeted Bernie.

"I'm all right," repeated Bernard, half sitting up in bed. The young doctor pushed him back, saying not unkindly, "There, there, young man, you've got to take a rest. You can go back to work pretty soon."

"I wish somebody'd shut that window," said Bernie, "they're all trooping through, dozens and dozens — I want them to stay *outside* —"

"It's the fever," said the boyish doctor matter of factly,

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turning to Annie. "He'll have these semi-delirious spells for nine days or so; then the condition will abate. He'll be all right. Good constitution. No need for alarm. I'll look in again to-night." And he passed on his way.

Not worry! Annie was shaken through and through. She went after the doctor, timidly touching him on the sleeve.

"Please — when you've finished here, can I speak to you a moment?" she asked pleadingly. He looked at her coldly, a trifle annoyed, yet somewhat touched, too, at her deep anxiety. He had long hours and much work with little pay. Ward patients meant just so much material to him. He had to spend his due term in the hospital before he could get his diploma. The men in those beds were to him merely "cases." There was nothing especially interesting in Bernie's case. Ordinary pneumonia. If he stopped to talk with every frightened wife and relative who beset him with questions he'd never get through his day's grind, and have his leave, and meet his girl.

"There's really nothing to tell you, madam," he said. "The patient is progressing satisfactorily. There is not much to do in pneumonia. It must run its course. He receives all necessary attention." (He knew this was not true, but he couldn't be bothered explaining how little help they had, what insufficient appropriations with which to work.) "You can visit him as often as you wish, within hours, and if anything should — ah — happen, you'll be promptly notified." And, nodding, he moved off to the next bed.

Annie did not dare detain him longer. With heart of lead she went back to Bernie's bedside and tried vainly to read from his blank face and wandering eyes how great the danger was. Bernie sometimes answered her; sometimes not. Unless she roused him he didn't seem to know she was there.

She stayed as long as she dared. But Robsie grew fret-

ful and she had to go. Bernie said "Good-by. Tell Simms I'll be in early with the mail, rain or shine."

Annie wiped her eyes on the baby's coat, stricken with helpless pity, and left the place.

That evening she went to Aunt Margaret's to tell her cheerless news and hear from the older woman hers.

"Ann," said Aunt Moggie, when the story of Bernie in the hospital and of her own lost position had been told, "I want you to promise not to worry over *me*. Simms let me go because he found a girl of nineteen at a smaller salary who could do my work. Maybe she'll do it better, I don't know. I shall find another place, as I did before. Perhaps it won't be easy — the older you grow the harder it is to find work — but I'll get something.

"Meantime I have a bit saved. But that isn't the point, dear. The point is there's a lesson in all this. I'm too old to profit by it. But *you* are not. When Bernard gets well you must see to it that he fits himself for something beyond mere mechanical work. My fingers were all I had to earn my living with. They're getting stiff and slow now, so I'm going steadily down. I was always too timid, too lacking in confidence to push to the front. Bernard has different qualities. He is bright and self-assured. He must have his chance. It can't be managed in a minute. We can't see far enough ahead yet even to guess what it should be. But when this trouble is over, we're going to begin working toward it. Do you understand, dear?"

"Yes," said Annie softly. "But that hospital is — is terrible, Aunt Moggie, I'm so afraid —"

"Don't be, dear. It's only because it's all new to you. To-morrow it will not seem so dreadful. The next day it will seem even less so. Just keep going, Nance, and keep hoping. It will all come right."

Annie found it was so. The terror of the hospital, the fear that Bernie would die, decreased day by day. Annie

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presently bore her burden of privation and anxiety as a matter of course — as the poor do bear their worries and sorrows. She fell gradually into the routine of straightening her house, going to market and taking the baby up to the hospital, sitting with Bernie as long as she could — all as a part of her day's work.

At the end of the second week of his illness his employer sent his fourteen dollars with a brief note that said the company regretted it was unable to continue his pay indefinitely, but would hold his place open.

It was from this time on that Annie learned what the depths of poverty meant. Aunt Margaret, her life-long source of help and courage, was no longer able to hold out financial aid. Annie reached the point of actually denying herself nourishment, that Robsie might have his milk and that a few dollars might remain to fend off the groceryman and the rent collector.

Yet the crisis of Bernard's sickness passed and he lived. For which primal fact she fell upon her knees in thankfulness.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### FOURTEEN DOLLARS FOR FOUR

**S**CARCELY had the wave of gratitude for Bernie's safety passed over her and subsided into ripples of lesser anxiety — rent, clothing, fuel and food — than came to Annie the knowledge that there was to be another baby. Annie had never thought deeply about motherhood one way or the other. Like poverty, sickness and toil, she had taken it for granted.

In her childhood, as she looked back, she had always had a baby to lug about, to care for, to deny herself for. Her mother had but two children younger than Annie. Most women of her familiar tenement district had at least four. The Kaplins, the Rothbergs, the Hennessys, the Simonettis — Annie could have ticked off a dozen families she used to know that had anywhere from five to twelve. You married. And you had children. With each new one all the others had less to eat, less to wear, less care from the tired mother, less room to breathe in, less chance to live.

Now the full tragedy of it all came home to Annie. That motherhood should have to be a tragedy! That this second baby whom she *wanted to want*, even as she had wanted little Rob, should be brought into a world that did not even assure him sustenance at his mother's breast. For as Annie peered into the dim months before her she could not see where even sufficient food would come from.

Aunt Margaret was still without a position and living on her slim savings. Janie was carrying the entire Hargan household on her wage that had been increased to eleven dollars. Bernie might get his old place back when he came

out of the hospital — at \$14. There would soon be four of them to live upon it, and every week the cost of food was rising. Where could money be found to buy the coming baby's outfit? She remembered the black calico wrappers with the tiny flowers that had constituted the wardrobe of her brother when he was born, a remnant of somber cotton being all Mrs. Hargan could afford, with her husband out of work.

Life seemed to be repeating the trials of early years, thought Annie as she rocked Robsie by the window and looked out over the vacant lot, whose waste-strewn surface was sodden with wintry rain. She knew that by walking three blocks west she would come to Stuyvesant Square, with its dignified, handsome homes. Here were many fine and kindly people — yet who knew no more of her perplexities and struggles than if they lived on another planet. They never walked east of Third Avenue. They were vaguely aware that long, slummy streets stretched over there, where poor families lived, and that poor families "always have such rafts of children."

Good ladies from the aid societies connected with churches gave Christmas parties to the tenement children. And sometimes visited their homes. They always meant well, and they usually left with comments to one another on the unthriftiness of East Side mothers, the untidy households they maintained, the too-badness of the fathers drinking beer, and the deplorability in general of slum conditions.

But what did they really *know* about it all? Annie asked herself bitterly. What desire had they to find out *why* the East Side women kept slovenly houses and the toiling fathers stopped at saloons? How easy for a well-housed, well-clothed, well-fed woman with one child and three maids to frown at the "rafts of children" at her back door step! Yet for all their frowns, she felt that every one of those women in the houses over there, every pros-

perous doctor and lawyer, every clergyman in the handsome churches, would shrink from her in horror if she voiced rebellion from this second motherhood.

She had read in newspapers the sayings of a famous public man who urged large families, even where there was no chance of the parents maintaining them in the essentials of life and health. What could such people know of the feelings of a woman who yearns for motherhood, yet shrinks from it almost as from deliberate crime?

Annie felt that she and Bernie and Robbie and the new little one would not starve. People didn't often starve *to death* in New York. For you could go to the "charities" and if you lived through the delay of investigation and measured up to all the moral standards of their code you would be fed. You could write to a newspaper if you were in impressively desperate need, and be relieved more quickly.

And there were police stations and the Salvation Army and missions and places like that. You just starved a little bit *all the time*. But that wasn't the point. The point was that she did not want to *get* that far down! She wanted to be free and independent to work and buy her honest way along. Why should the chances for help exist *after* you fell into trouble, instead of *before*? She hid her face in the baby's velvety neck and tried to force herself to think sanely. She must keep her head and not get panicky.

There was housework to finish and Bernie to visit at the hospital (the folks on Stuyvesant Square did not have to send their sick to free wards in hospitals) and her marketing to do.

She got up from her rocking chair, put Robsie on the bed and stirred about. There was relief in mere movement, the commonplace motions that "got something done." Things were not at the lowest yet. She still had a few dollars in her purse from the pay Bernard's boss had sent. She had eked out the rent for a half month. The baby was well and hearty, thank God, and likely everything would brighten

before there were four of them to feed. Annie's heritage from her father was the imperishable gold of hopefulness.

She found Bernie slightly better. He was in his third week of illness now, and pathetically thin and weak. But he was getting cross and that, said the friendly colored man in the next bed, "was a right good sign."

The poor fellows in that double row of beds in the hospital ward, such of them as were able to notice, came to look forward to the daily visit of Annie and the baby. Sometimes she found Bernard asleep, and would talk to them a little, getting fragmentary insights into their lives so wrecked and desolate, or so filled with trouble that her own dwindled into insignificance. She never left the hospital without a feeling of wonder that any of its inmates survived, so poorly equipped was it with help and comforts.

On her way out one day she passed the dispensary. The men and women who sat so patiently there on the hard benches, waiting for the one young doctor to attend to them in turn, wrung Annie's soul with pity. Desperately ill, tenement dwellers like herself, too poor, despite their neverceasing labors, to afford a paid physician! And the little babies, wailing and thin! Why did this have to *be*, with so much room and so much wealth upon the earth? Annie could never find the answer to this question.

The thin, lonely days wore on. The weather turned suddenly warmer and on a certain mild spring morning Annie was told at the hospital that her husband was almost in condition to go home.

"Of course, he will need care and good food," admonished the young interne with the usual disregard of all probable resources at the command of those so glibly advised. "A relapse is dangerous in pneumonia. Watch him carefully — no draughts, no exertion, he mustn't go back to work too soon. Plenty of milk and eggs to build him up. Then he'll be all right."

Annie said nothing. She was thinking what she could

get the most money on by pawning. That afternoon she chose a clock that the girls at the office had given her for a wedding present, a fur neckpiece and muff that Bernie had bought her in the palmy days of their first year, an umbrella, a skirt and jacket of hers that would no longer be serviceable, and a linen tablecloth, also a relic of the uptown flat. Bernard would miss none of these things and they ought to bring quite a sum. She made up a newspaper bundle, took the umbrella and went with the lot to a dirty little shop on First Avenue kept by "J. I. Cohn, Money Lent on Personal Property. Best Value Given."

For the clock Mr. Cohn gave \$2. After minute examination and the complaint that the fur season was over and he would be put to the expense of storing the things, he offered \$7 for the scarf and muff. The umbrella brought fifty cents, the tailored suit (rather worn it looked as he held it up to the light) fetched a grudging dollar fifty, it being too small a size for his "trade." The tablecloth, ninety cents.

With \$11.90 in pocket Annie felt almost rich. With rigid skimping she could get along two weeks on that, providing nourishing food for Bernie. And two weeks hence Bernie would probably be well again.

So Bernie came home from the hospital and sat in the spring sunshine that flooded in across the blessed, tin-canny vacant lot, and played with Robsie, and swallowed the milk and eggs Annie fixed for him — and slowly gained.

Then, by and by, Annie told him the news about the baby-to-be. Bernie looked startled. He said nothing. But he put his arm around her and they stood together looking out over the lot whose ugliness was softened in the dusk.

The next day Bernie went down to his old employer, asked for his fourteen dollar job back and got it. He had intended looking around a little to see if he could get a better place. But now it seemed necessary to take what he could, and quickly. He had been out six weeks in all. He went

back to work feeling weak and listless. His strength returned but slowly. Annie saw he needed livening up and again urged the meager athletic resources of the neighborhood that she had gleaned from Rose Gubin.

"There are the public baths, Bern, with a swimming pool and everything," she submitted hopefully.

"Yeah. Swell chance to get in there in the hot weather with the crowd I saw waiting outside the other night!"

"Well, how about the school in Twentieth Street? They say there's a real nice gym fitted up over there, and I know they *did* need an instructor evenings. You could try that."

That was better. Bernie did try, and as luck would have it, they had been unable to get any one to run things for the boys, and Bernard undertook the job. It was a volunteer job, of course, without pay. But it gave him an interest outside his work, and Annie felt more thankful than as if something good had happened to herself.

About the same time Aunt Moggie got a temporary position to go out of town as secretary to a woman writer. It did not pay much, but Annie urged her to take it for her health's sake. So Annie was alone much of the time that long, hot summer.

Just before Christmas the baby was born — another boy, whom they named David. There was scant ceremony attending David's birthday. His mother worked at her household tasks much as usual; then went round to the hospital, two or three blocks away, was registered, card-indexed, examined, and passed through to the proper ward, along with a dozen other tenement mothers.

She and tiny David were cared for decently, kept the regulation nine days, given some stereotyped instructions in care and feeding, and duly sent home to East Sixteenth Street, where Annie took up her new problem of caring for four on fourteen dollars a week.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### FOUR LEAN YEARS

**T**O chronicle the life of the Carrolls for the next four years would be like studying a strip of cinema film. Each week, each month, the picture was ever so slightly different. There was change and progression, but only by observing it at considerable intervals could it be seen.

They stayed on at the Sixteenth Street tenement, which fell into worse repair every day. When some youngster kicked out one of the uprights of the banister with his stubby boot, it remained out. A lost knob on the front door was replaced by a bit of knotted string. The pane that Robsie cracked by beating on it with his soup spoon had to be carefully pasted with paper and still more carefully washed whenever Annie "did" the windows. Their furniture grew shabbier. The rug wore through and had to have a mat thrown over it. Everything was a little poorer, a little more battered.

At the end of a year Bernard was "raised" to \$15. He was still a shipping clerk in the same chemical firm. At the end of the second year he got \$16. And there he stopped. In due time arrived another baby, a girl, but Bernie's sixteen dollars became a wall against which the needs of his family pushed and battered in vain.

He wanted to find something better, for the cost of living was rising at an astounding rate. But he had no time to hunt. Four evenings a week he went to the public school gymnasium, getting a little exercise and sociability in exchange for instruction and supervision. Once in a while

in his lunch hour he would try to follow up some advertisement he had seen, but it was always the same story — the job had been filled by an earlier comer, or he was compelled to wait so long to see the man in charge that his time was up before anything could be consummated.

Gradually he stopped trying. Annie, always studying him closely, saw he was beginning to settle into the rut, becoming like thousands of other young men whose ever-increasing responsibilities kept them chained to monotonous toil.

Like the man next door to the Carrolls, who had a wife and five children, and was a driver for a milk company at \$16.50 a week, he could see no way but to keep on working at what he had.

Annie saw, too, with heavying heart, that Bernie was quieter, less spirited than he used to be. He was not morose. He just seemed to have lost his buoyancy. He never spoke nowadays of the "chances there were if you only got in with the right people." He never read the financial columns, or mentioned "pools" and "fliers." Annie was glad of this particular thing, but sorry for what it portended — that Bernie no longer cherished his dreams of prosperity, no longer looked hopefully to "making his five thou' a year, with a nice little gas buggy and a house in Jersey." Annie sighed over her dishwashing and darning as she remembered his youthful talk back at Simms's.

That her own dreams had not come fully true caused her less distress. She had the babies. And to a woman as feminine as she, husband, home and children were the vital facts of life, after all. From her neighbors she learned much that made her feel fortunate by comparison. Three of the children of the woman next door, the milk driver's wife, were sickly, one a cripple from being wrongly operated upon at a hospital clinic. The husband drank occasionally and came home ugly and brutal. Many a time Annie took the mother and the frightened children into her own rooms

while Bernie scuffled and argued, and finally soothed the drink-inflamed fellow across the hall.

On the first floor lived a family who were suffering to the starvation point through a tailors' strike, which lasted almost a summer. Annie met the wife one day going out with the familiar newspaper bundle — the unfailing last resource of the tenement women. As Annie stopped in the lower hallway for a word with her, the woman's trembling hands let the parcel fall. A pair of men's shoes and a baby's coat spilled out.

"Ah — you'll not get more than fifty cents on those, Mrs. Rafetzky," said Annie, to whom the package for the pawnbroker was no longer either a novel sight or experience. "Let me lend it to you — please." Her heart yearned toward this neighbor who had so often in more prosperous times made little gifts of Passover wine, or maybe a plate of fresh-cooked "latkes" or "egg matsoths" for the children of the "*goyim*" upstairs! Many the time, too, she had helped Annie when the babies had colds or fevers, proffering homely remedies and much sound advice.

The woman shook her head, however, and a light came into her dark eyes that reminded Annie of the "Firebrand girl."

"*Oi veh!*" she said, wrapping up the things again determinedly. "It's bad now, with the strike. But you can't have always luck. My husband is right. I wouldn't want him to go back to work until it's settled — and settled right. We have hard times, yes. But by and by it will come good times again." She shrugged her shoulders expressively. "I'll make de pinebroker give me half a dollar on the shoes, and for the baby's coat fifteen cents — maybe twenty."

Annie called after her.

"I've got to go out this afternoon for a couple of hours. Could your Sammie come upstairs and mind the children for me?" She knew she could reasonably give Sammie a quarter for this service and a dime for going to the store,

and that Sammie would immediately turn the money into the family treasury, with pride swelling his narrow little chest.

It was arranged and the small diplomacy achieved. The tenement poor have their codes and their prides. As Annie looked back from her later life she knew she had never in fat years experienced such friendships as she had known in the lean Sixteenth Street days.

Her errand that afternoon was a visit to Rose Gubin, who lived in the heart of the ghetto to the south. Her friendship with Rose had been recemented by another of those services which the poor render to the poor in times of need.

Rose, with an invalid husband to support and four growing youngsters, had managed out of the wreck of her venture "uptown" to buy an interest in a small delicatessen shop. It was in a narrow basement, three steps down from the street, on a block where more than 3,000 persons lived. The tenements here were different from Annie's. Newer, much higher — seven stories some of them — seething and boiling with humanity. They were the "new law houses," with open airshafts, cement floors and a bathroom, such as it was, to each flat.

Still, Annie had her vacant lot out back, to which four years had added its due agglomeration of old shoes, corsets, rusty cans, yellowed newspapers and broken glass, but had not yet shut out the breeze and sunshine. She would not have changed homes with Rose for any of the doubtful advantages her towering, glowering building afforded.

Following the birth of Baby Anna, when through a succession of sicknesses, the Carrolls' finances had reached their lowest ebb, Rose — still the kind, practical Rosie Rothberg of childhood — met Annie on the street one day.

"Ain't you the foolish one, worrying yourself to a bone about the grocer, and me with a store where you can take the whole stock and pay when you like!" said Rose

heartily. " Didn't I tell you I know what trouble is? You ain't got troubles, Ann, like there is down my way. When you want a change you come down to my flat and sit a while with my mother while I tend the store. She hasn't been strong for a long while. She don't see hardly any one but the children, and she gets lonely."

Annie accepted Rose's offer of help. But the payment of the money debt did not end the matter for Annie. She kept up an affectionate friendship with the Gubin-Rothberg family. She drank many a hospitable glass of tea with them, sat many an hour listening to stories of Russia, the Rothbergs' moderate prosperity there, and the coming to the " land of promise," which, after all, had only substituted new troubles for old. True, there were no hideous " pogroms " here. And a Jew might travel where he would, find education in the public schools, follow what profession he chose, live in whatever neighborhood he could afford.

" But, oh, the dirt! " Mrs. Rothberg would hold up her hands — still handsome, shapely hands, for all the household delving they had done, and showing a strain of ancestral fineness. " The dirt of Suffolk Street! I think when I first saw Suffolk Street something broke in my heart. The garbage piled around the doorsteps, the pushcarts loaded with everything and the dust from the street blowing over them. The smells. The dirty people. The dreadful, dreadful tenements. Nu, will I ever forget it?

" And yet I remember," she would go on in her broken English, " the first night in that Suffolk Street room. There was my husband and me and Rosie and the four smaller ones. We made our beds on the bare floors. And when we laid down to sleep, my husband he said, ' Well, we will not be disturbed by soldiers searching the place! We will have peace.'

" It was hot and terrible in that place, with the noises and the smells. But in the morning when we woke up my husband he said again, ' Well, I thank The Uppermost for this

peaceful night.' Ah — maybe you don't know what that means?" Mrs. Rothberg would smile her melancholy smile at Annie. "For in Russia, the gendarmes, policemen of the czar, would any time come and pound upon our door and we would have to let them in and answer all their questions and let them search everywhere. It was a wonderful thing that this never happened any more. And that we were allowed to live without passports and licenses and a thousand persecutions and things forbidden.

"But the dirt and the dreadful, crowded tenements — I never could get used to that, and I never shall," she would invariably add. "This America is the 'land of the free' for some, yes — for those who come from the terrible places in the old country, who had to live in poverty and filth. But for those like us, who lived clean and decent for all the burdens we had to carry, Oi, the East Side is terrible! It kills. It breaks the heart."

Annie learned much of the terrific struggle of the foreign poor in this Land of the Free, from the Rothbergs' reminiscences, the Rafetzkys' sufferings during the strike, and the eternal battles fought by other of her neighbors for mere life and sustenance.

She came to know children who had never owned a toy in their lives. Men of twenty and more who had never possessed a new suit of clothes — who bought every poor rag and boot they owned from a musty cellar where the best was third or fourth hand!

She saw seven-year-old boys selling papers in the street, hiding their pennies in their shoe to "keep the cop from findin' 'em." In the house next door lived a woman who stood at the corner of a certain street till 2 o'clock in the morning tending her newsstand, through the bitterest days of winter, through the burning days of summer, through sickness, through many terms of approaching motherhood —

She found an urchin one day in the lot behind her flat burying something very small wrapped in paper. Carefully

he marked the spot with a discarded kettle. When the child saw Annie watching him he leaped protectingly toward his treasure. But she caught and questioned him. The poor little devil, it seemed, had found in the street a dime! Fearing robbery if he carried so prodigious a sum about upon his person, he thought to hide it where he could come back and look at it each day till he could decide its disposition. Annie assured him it would be safe — that she would watch the spot from her window. The little lad believed her, and went upon his way feeling a capitalist.

She heard a small girl say to another one day:

"Ooooh, they got loads and loads of money! Whaddyer think? They got a whole cake of white stuff in the kitchen to scrub the dirt off pans with! They *buy* it — just special for that. They don't use ashes. You just rub it on a rag-like, and wipe the pans — and they get clean!"

There was incredulity on the other child's face at the tale of this prodigal spending. Annie could see she was searching her mind for some story of equal impressiveness.

"There's a girl in our house," she narrated with an expression that said, "You won't believe this, but it's true," "that gets a white roll *with butter* on it every single day when she comes home from school! She dassent eat it on the street, cause they'd all want bites. She goes under the stairs in the hallway. I *seen* her!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE STORM BREAKS

**I**F Bernie had been asked just when things first began to be utterly depressing at home he would have been at a loss to say. The sliding down was very gradual. There *had* been an evening when he noticed things seemed different — not tidy. Annie's work-dress was shabby and soiled, carelessly turned in at the neck for coolness. She looked nerve strained and weary. Damp wisps of hair drooped about her face. The children were noisy or fretful, according to each one's degree of health. The supper table appeared carelessly laid, the meal unappetizing and scant.

Had this been before the fourth baby's advent, wondered Bernie? Or afterward, during that trying time when Annie could not recover strength, and the work, the bills and the general anxiety piled up till it seemed each day must certainly bring the unbearable woe? Or had it been still later, during the little poor baby's sickness, when Annie did not sleep for three terrible nights, and the neighbors came in and helped, and said it was "summer complaint" and they better send him to the hospital quick?

Annie had taken him early one morning, and the young doctor said "All right," and not to worry. Annie had hurried home to her other three children, her disordered flat, her eternal problems of food and rent and the rest of it. Yes, it must have been about this time. For without warning word was sent quite casually from the hospital that the baby had died. And Annie for once gave up. She went about silent and dazed, sitting for hours just looking out of the window, not hearing the clamor of Robbie and Dave, or the crying of Anna.

"I should have kept him home," she would say when Bernie tried to rouse or comfort her. "I might have

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known it. It's my fault — my fault —” repeating it over and over in a fruitless agony of self-blame.

Nor was that dreadful time the worst that came as the years of their marriage wore on. The firm Bernard worked for failed and again was he faced by that deadliest enemy to a young married man's progress — the necessity of getting *immediate* employment.

No matter what the unfitness of the labor may be, nor how lean the wage, hurry, hurry, get something, take anything, lower your price before some other applicant under-bids you, fight for it, grab at it — *get it*, or you and your family will suffer and die!

How well Bernie remembered his last day's work at the chemical house, his last collection of his pay, his last taking of his hat and overcoat from the peg on the office wall, his “good-bys” and his “Well, so longs” and his “Good lucks,” as he separated from the other fellows to hit again the weary trail of the job.

Doggedly he resumed it, trudging from office to office, hoping, expecting, failing — and hoping again. Times were bad, people told him. The sudden outbreak of war in Europe made capital wary. Business failures were reported daily. Going concerns were discharging men, “doubling up,” cutting expenses to the bone. Real estate and building operations reached a standstill, and wherever Bernie went the business seemed to be in some way contingent upon the dark war outlook. In every place work, when offered at all, was of maximum heaviness and minimum wage.

Bernie didn't know Kipling, but upon the fourth day of the weary search a suggestion of the thought “He travels the fastest who travels alone” seeped into his mind. Instantly he was ashamed of it and whipped it from him, for he loved his family with clean and honest love. It kept coming back and nipping at his weakened spirit like some vicious bird of prey to a creature too spent to fight.

The last establishment he visited that day was a tobacco factory where a shipping clerk was needed immediately.

"Experience?" asked the man laconically.

Bernie's answers were eager and ample. The man noted the eagerness, the tiredness and also the intelligence in young Carroll's face.

"Can you start right away — early to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" Bernie would have started that night if necessary.

"All right. Salary's twelve to begin."

Bernard's heart sank. Twelve dollars! Before he could say anything the manager went on briskly.

"It's really only an assistant clerk I want. There's no packing or heavy work. Like to try it?"

"But I — I've been getting sixteen right along!"

"For how long?" asked the man quickly. Bernie saw at once he had made a mistake. One should not get the same salary too long.

"For — for several years," he answered, hurrying to the suggestion that since he had a wife and three children to support, the salary to start might possibly be set at, say, fourteen.

The manager shook his head.

"We can't base salaries," said he, "on the size of a man's family. We base them on his value to us. I can get a hundred men to fill this job at twelve. I think you can fill it. You'd better try. You can work up."

Bernie had an idea that if he turned on his heel and walked away the man would call him back and offer him the fourteen. But he didn't dare risk it. Bad as it was, it was something. Annie was a good manager. She could stretch it; she'd *have* to.

Bernie took the place.

But he was heartsick. What good was it being experi-

enced, knowing all the ways there were of making money, if you couldn't even get a chance to tackle a proposition with the slightest risk to it? What good was self-confidence if you had no play for it? How could you "talk up" to a man when you didn't dare refuse whatever stingy little job he offered you because of the drag of dependent — He stopped the traitor thought again and spurned it from him. But he was tired to the core, foot-sore and cross and disgusted with everything. By the time he reached home he was in as low a mood as he had ever been — as low as any *young* man could be.

Annie, as it happened, was quite as tired as he. Her nerves were frayed, her body exhausted from work and the incessant demands of the children.

Bernie could no more remember what started the strange domestic storm that followed his arrival at the flat than one can tell just which shower drop first touches the ground. Perhaps he flung a cross word to Rob, who was making a distracting din with his toy horn. It may have been a complaint about the state of the room or the meagerness of dinner. It didn't matter what it was. Anything would have done it.

There was a sudden temperamental clash like the coming together of surcharged storm clouds. It was the sort of thing common enough between married pairs — justifiably common between the poverty-torn spirits of the tenement man and woman.

There was nothing odd about it except that the Carrolls had few flare-ups, and never before one of such intensity. It was as if the accumulated heartaches and dissatisfactions of years were released at a touch, as the insignificant match makes the mighty havoc possible.

Whatever was the word that started it, there were soon others and still others, bandied back and forth, without thought, without care for where or what they hit. The

words mattered little. They voiced rebellion against circumstance, the outbursts of pent-up hearts, weak hittings-out from weary bodies.

"Twelve dollars!" cried Annie huskily, bringing her hand down hard upon the table. "Why, we can't *live* on it! I can't buy food for us all with it, or pay the rent, or find clothes to cover us!"

"You can't! Well, you'll *have* to, that's all there is to it. You can pay less for things! You've always had expensive notions. You're always talking about buying nice clothes for the children and new things for the flat. I suppose you think I can send the boys to private school on my earnings!"

Annie's blazing eyes stopped him.

"I have expensive notions! That's a nice thing for you to say, with all I used to hear from you about making your five thousand a year! Where are your ambitions? What real effort have you made?"

"I guess I've made all the effort I could!" flung Bernard, shoving his plate back so sharply that it upset the baby's glass of milk.

The outraged baby raised a yowl of protest. Annie snatched him up, with a glare at her husband, and hushed the little one with kisses and mother words.

"What's a man to do anyhow," went on Bernie, "with a houseful of children and a million expenses to meet? It's nothing but dig, dig, dig! All *you* think of is the kids. Does it ever occur to you that *I'd* like to live a little, too?"

Annie turned.

"Live a little — what living do I do, struggling here day after day, year after year, to make ends meet? Is my work easier than yours, I'd like to know? Who *bears* the children? Who takes care of them when they're sick or hurt? Who teaches them and tries to bring them up with some decent sort of ideals? Extravagance on sixteen a week!

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And now it's to be twelve! Huh!" Annie tossed her head and snapped her fingers in wordless expressiveness. She was not thinking — only feeling.

"Well — it's all there is," said Bernard, a sullen note creeping into his voice; "you'll have to economize."

"Yes," murmured Annie, cold with anger. "I'll have to economize."

They said no more. The thunders and lightnings passed. But to carry out the simile a sort of steady cold rain went on falling, making things sodden, shrouding the little home in gloom.

To make matters worse, Bernard developed a determined viewpoint in the matter of spending his meager wage. He was not naturally niggardly, any more than Annie was by nature a shrew. But the continued grip of poverty causes strange spasms of the soul. Emotions get criss-crossed and out of their current. Virtues begin to pass the virtue limit and become vices. Strange mixed motives appear.

At all events, Bernie took it into his head to apportion to his wife a daily sum which he judged adequate for the purchase of food. This sum was 65 cents for six days in the week and a dollar for Sundays. He set aside \$3.50 each week for the rent and allowed himself 60 cents for carfare and \$1.20 for lunches. This left \$1.80 weekly for the Carrolls' allotment of clothes and other necessaries; while daily the cost of living soared.

Had Annie been in normal mind she would have seen that it was about as fair an arrangement as could be worked out of Bernie's pay. But being in a highly-strung state of nerves and nursing still the pain of their quarrel, the mere idea of his daily dole was abhorrent. She felt it to be high-handed and cruel — a reflection upon her administrative capacities. It rankled in her sick mind.

Her love for Bernard became submerged in a feeling of outrage. That she should be so treated—she who slipped

food from her own plate onto the plates of her children; she who went without warm clothes in order that they might be protected!

She voiced this to Bernie one night. It was probably broached in untactful words. Or at the wrong time. Who knows how quarrels start? Who knows the exact point where two persons who love each other drop ideals and pick up reality? Exchange self-restraint for the luxury of frankness?

"I won't stand it any longer!" cried Annie at one point of the painful conflict. "I'm going to leave this—this"—she glanced around in search for words—"this *prison* where I have to take the crumbs that are flung to me, and never get a chance to go anywhere or see anything or have anything!"

Bernard lifted his eyes slowly and looked at her.

"You mean you're going to live somewhere else?"

"Yes—just that! If I've got to suffer this way I'd rather do it alone, where I won't be taunted for 'extravagance' and treated like a child! I'll make my own way. I won't be a drag on you any longer—yes, that's how you act, as if we were a drag on you! You, with your sixty-five cents a day! I tell you I won't stand it. I'm worn out. I'm through." And she flung away, with heaving breast and hands clenched.

For all her excitement and hysteria, she meant it. She had not known how much she meant it until now. Bernard saw it, and it cut deep. He had been wrong, and he realized it now. Which made him angrier, for he was angry now with Annie for making him angry with himself. He could still have saved the situation by a kiss or a laugh which might have relaxed the strain on their nerves. But he couldn't manage it, and widened the breach by the resentful shot:

"All right, have your way! You'll see how easy it is to

[REDACTED]

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n a living for four in these damned times. See how far  
i'll get — 'alone'!"  
And Bernard snatched his shabby hat from the couch and  
raged out of the room.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

**"WHEN POVERTY COMES IN THE DOOR —"**

THE two smaller children set up a howl which, when it went unheeded by their mother, they presently quenched. Annie heard nothing. She stood in the middle of the room staring at the door as if she could see Bernard through it — Bernard walking down the tenement stairs with that ugly look on his face, and out into the depressing street, and away, away, not caring how angry she was, how hurt, how tired.

A feeling of unreality numbed her. This could not be she, Annie Carroll, facing the future alone. It was not Bernard who had gone out of their home, slamming the door behind him. This — this hideous quarrel could not have happened, not *really*. In a moment she would wake from the spell and find things as they had been.

She waited for the spell to break, but nothing happened. Her chin dropped and her glance traveled down her arm with its rolled-up sleeve, to her inert hand. She put it out slowly and looked at it — the left one, with the plain ring upon her captive finger. Her hand, but how ugly it was, how workworn! She dropped it limply to her side again. How poor and soiled her dress was, and her shoes — ugh!

She stared about the untidy room, at the table with the fragments of potato and bread on the children's plates, the drops of blue milk left in their glasses, the dish of beans that Bernie had complained about!

At sight of the detestable dish, her blood grew hot again. How she loathed this place, this ravening poverty that snapped at her children from morning till night, that turned

her life into one never-relaxing struggle, that tore her nerves and dragged her — dragged them all — down into a sodden stupor of spirit!

After all her dreams of love and home and happiness, this was what came! After all her work and all her sacrifice, she must reach the degradation of having sixty-five cents a day doled out *to curb her extravagance!*

Annie flung herself upon the ragged, spring-broken sofa and laughed. It was very unpleasant to hear. It frightened little Anna so much that she jumped up and down, crying, "Muvver, Muvver, Muvver, Muvver!" in a staccato of baby panic. This brought Annie back, if not to calm, at least to definite action.

There was work to be done and no time to waste. If she put off her program till morning, or even till Bernard came back, she knew there would be no family revolt. There would be anger and tears, then sullenness, and a gradual subsidence into the old order. There would be other quarrels and oftener, now that the habit was established and the brakes well off. She would grow draglier day by day, the house shabbier, the children iller fed. And suppose — God in Heaven, suppose there should be more of them! She and the children must go, and go quickly. Go first, and think afterward. One must not threaten and not carry out.

Annie did not even know where to go, but she never relaxed the rush of preparations for leaving, as her mind groped through this possibility and that, for a temporary harbor. Her mother's flat? Her spirit cried no. The same reluctance held her back that makes people withhold secrets from their close kin, and take strangers freely into confidence. There was not even the refuge of Aunt Moggie's room. For the woman writer who had given her work for a summer years ago, discerned in Margaret Bailly an employee who could be kept on tap twenty-four hours a day in return for bed and board and the skimped

pay of the elderly. So she urged her to stay and Margaret, aware of her waning power to earn, was glad of the haven.

As Annie flung a few necessities into her paper-leather satchel and started the children into their shabby coats, she smiled in bitterness to realize that even separation is a luxury for the rich alone. Like clean air and sunshine, liberty of action is for those who can pay more than one rent!

She had been making absentminded replies to Robsie and Dave and Little Anna for half an hour. But when one of them piped, "Mother, where we goin'—to Mis' Gubin's?" the answer to her riddle was found.

"Yes, dears—to Rose Gubin's—that's just where we're going," she said. And the youngsters were too happy at the prospect to care for reasons why. Rose Gubin's shop with its heavenly blend of cooked meats and herring, drippy dill pickles and luscious mysteries in jars and boxes, was to the small Carrolls one of the outposts of paradise.

Annie counted serenely upon their welcome. She knew the Jewish heart, which is the sympathetic heart of the poor mellowed by centuries of search for hospitality and peace. She had known Rose to take in whole evicted families in bitter times, feeding them from her little shop's stock, sleeping them in rows upon her floor.

She was now in a frenzy to be off, her heels clear of possible detainment or pursuit. She gave a last look round the room, shooed the children before her, thrust the key under the oilcloth where Bernard would find it, and fled from her desolate house like a refugee.

"Ach—don't call it anything! I wouldn't be gladder to see my own sister than you, Annie Carroll. What with my man sick and my boys away and my old mother, Heaven bless her, needing care all the while, shouldn't I have help in the store? You can work around here till you can get something better. The kids can sleep in any corner. Shuh! Don't say another word about it!"

It was Rose Gubin's fourth or fifth assurance of welcome. She had heard Annie's story hours since, and they were sitting now together in Rose's stuffy, cheery back room with the rest of the household bedded for the night. Probably most Jewish wives would have counseled Annie to go back to her man and submit to the scourge of circumstance. Not so Rose.

Rose's Hebrew ideals had been diluted by environment and circumstance. She was of modern mind, with traces of conservatism. She had been the man of her family so long that she had the self-made woman's scorn of domestic peace too dearly bought. Yet she loved domestic life. She wanted every one to be married — but prosperously. And while she had nursed no very high ambitions for herself, either in marriage or career, she kept her racial reverence for learning, and had always admired Annie's ambition to work herself from tenement life, and grasp the finer things.

She did not regard Bernard Carroll as among the "finer things." She never mentioned it to Annie, of course, but she felt she might have done better, with her training for a career and the chances it ought to bring! That Annie loved Bernard, Rose did not consider particularly. There again she viewed with an Oriental eye the elements of the good marriage. Rose felt it was just as easy to like a well-fixed young fellow as a struggling one.

A good marriage was more conducive to love than love was to a good marriage. It was too late now to mourn for the good marriage. But not too late to go after the career. So instead of telling Annie to "kiss and make up," to return to her dishwashing and her humiliating dole of pence, Rose talked rebellion.

"Look here, Annie, with your looks and nice manners," she encouraged, "and the slaving you put in to educate yourself for a job, you can do better for yourself, even with those three kids on your hands, than going back to him."

"Oh, Rose, isn't it terrible that children should *be* a burden — ever! It was the children, four of them, Rosie, and coming so close together, that made everything so hard for Bern. He was so sick, and before he was strong again he had to take any old job he could to keep us going. He lost hope, Rose, and sort of changed in his disposition. We both did, I guess — wore down to a thin edge. But I — I won't go back to his daily allowance and his eternal fault-finding. I've got some pride left, Rose."

Her voice was wavering on the verge of tears.

"There, there, dear, don't you get yourself sick with fretting! We'll go to bed now, and in the morning you can hunt for something. The war's making all kinds of chances for smart young women. And if you don't find what you want, here's the store. Now don't you worry. I always knew you was cut out for better things than you got. They're still coming to you, mark me. Now shoo! Get into my bed — inside by the wall, 'cause I got to get out early."

Annie put her arms round Rose's neck and let her cheek rest a moment upon the luxurious pad of her shoulder. How good Rose was, and how understanding! What sublime comfort there was in having a *woman* to confide in. Annie suddenly knew how she had been missing her Aunt Moggie since she had lived with her authoress-employer in the suburbs. She realized the deep need of the feminine nature for sistership. It was clear that no matter how well beloved a woman might be, no masculine companionship fully satisfied. A woman wants a woman friend to grapple to herself with those bonds of understanding that make feminine friendships so splendid when there is no taint of sex rivalry — and so deadly when there is.

With her face against Rose's broad bosom, Annie's mind flashed back fantastically to a girl who had lived on her block and "gone wrong," as the neighbors put it. This girl had passed her in the street one day and pled with her

eyes for recognition. Annie knew now why she had. Wealth and luxury weren't enough. She wanted some one — some *woman* — to understand and to be friendly. Annie sensed the feeling of the women who live in the western lumber camps and mining country, and go long distances just to watch the eastern train come through, so as to see a woman once in a while, and not just men. . . .

Rose was patting her back with a cushiony hand.

"It's a queer world, Annie, queerer than we used to think when we went to school together, hey? We used to think all we had to do was get married and keep house and have babies. The men would earn the money. And we would spend it. That was how things was divided. Being mothers and taking care of the house — we thought that was our job. Well, now we know it's only half of our job. Earning the money too, that's the other half. It seems our natural job ain't a paid job. It don't count."

"Oh, Rose, it's wrong and unnatural, like war and hate and all the sacrifices people have to make. If people just wouldn't be so willing to *stand* things! There wouldn't be any war if the people themselves, of every country, refused to be shoved into it. There wouldn't be the kind of poverty that has broken up our home if women insisted on being paid for motherhood — by the government or something, if their husbands can't earn enough. But men *ought* to be able to earn enough, if only *something* was different, I don't know just what, Rose. It's all a horrible puzzle and nightmare!"

"Well, *I* know what," said Rose grimly. "It's the women that's going to change things. Women are just beginning. You wait. Men have got this world in a fine mess, but the women are going to clean it up, once they get good and sick of the way things are. You take your own medicine, Annie. Stop standing what you don't like, and go get what you want. You're away. Now *stay* away! It's right."

She kissed Rose, and with full heart undressed and climbed into her friendly bed.

Bernard meanwhile found no friend in the sense that Rose was a friend. In a rage he had tramped blindly from his tenement door eastward to the docks and down along the river front, kicking at bits of this and that that chanced before his boot-toes, and glaring redly at nothing in particular. Slowly his anger cooled into sullenness, from sullenness to a lowness of spirit that had I-don't-care at the bottom.

A close observer would have seen that his face had been molded by nature into good-humored lines. That the play of muscles about his set jaw meant nerves. That the twitching lips meant nerves. That the clenched hands rammed into the taut pockets meant nerves. That the whole look of him was not the look of a vicious person nor of a hopelessly weak person, nor yet of one who had sullenness among his characteristics. Even now he looked more like a boy who had been larruped for mischief than a thirty-two-year-old father of three, who had quarreled with his mate and was at the most ticklish turning of his life.

Said close observer, if fairly intelligent and experienced, would have diagnosed Bernard Carroll as a squarely average young American who had been "got" by the steady strain of adversity. Not a super man who laughs best when fortune is at worst.

If he had been jacked up right then by some stronger mind than his — some one *more* than average — who would have kicked and cuffed his tired mind out of its lethargy and back into poise, Bernie might have turned about and flung homeward before his family had left. He might have been made to see the trail leading upward from his deadening toil and become one of the ever-increasing body of those who struggled out of the slums. In his crucial hour, how-

ever, instead of being directed upward, the hand of chance appeared — with thumb down.

"That's twice you've walked on my toe! What's troubling you, son, you seem abstracted?"

A pleasant voice spoke out of the semi-darkness where Bernard had been pacing, at the water end of a wharf. He made out a man sitting on the stringpiece, looking up at him sociably. He mumbled an apology and started on, but the fellow rose and came beside him. He was good-looking, well dressed and a few years older than Bernie.

"Whatsermatter, down on your luck?" he went on in comradely tone. Bernard did not reply. "Say, Bud, don't be grouchy. Whatever's on your mind, spill it. If it strikes in, it'll poison you just as if you breathed carbon dioxide.

"I know what I'm talking about, son. Been reading up on it. Depression produces things in your blood — I forget what they call 'em — and joy makes other kinds of things — they've got a name too. Consult any scientific work for particulars. In the meantime, just step this way. I'll guarantee that whatever's bothering you will immediately float into the ambient ethers."

Bernard made a slight effort to shake him off, but he might have spared himself the trouble. The cheerful one linked arms and, talking all the while, steered Bernard landward down a street or two and through a door into a small, cheerily lighted café.

"You don't look like a grouch," the unknown was saying as he walked Bernie to a little table set with a coarse cloth, a pair of glass salt and pepper shakers with celluloid tops, a bottle of ketchup and a spotted bill of fare. "Probably been working too hard. Nerves, likely. That's what crimps most of us."

He took up the card and studied it, evidently not expecting an answer, although Bernard was rapidly thawing in the warmth and charm of the fellow's manner.

The smell of food and the sight of human beings sitting about, going through the normal business of eating, drinking and talking, began to remove the abnormal conditions of his own life further and further from the foreground of his thoughts. It was good to be taken hold of and led somewhere, and to be sitting down, considering ham and eggs in company with this sympathetic, relaxing young man.

"I haven't had a bite since noon," said the relaxing young man.

"Neither have I, come to think of it," said Bernard. And with the words, a twinge of appetite returned.

"Bring us two ham-and-eggs, and say, Mike, shoot a couple of your very prettiest Gordon daisies first—in a hurry."

And with the serious work of the enterprise off his mind, the stranger planted his elbows on the table and resumed his talk. He was a sort of chronic samaritan, a kind-hearted, easy-going reporter fellow, for whom the setting of the sun marked the rising of good fellowship. For him living began when the toil that made living possible was ended. Whosoever crossed his path in hours of ease was his friend. If chance brought him a derelict or a down-and-outer, so much the better. There was scope for the application of his Khayamish precepts, an after-sense of having supplied a need. To this well-meaning chap of persuasive tongue and easy pocket Bernard was merely a man in the dumps who needed cheering.

When Bernard reached his flat about midnight his senses were too dulled to register its desolation upon his brain. He kicked off his boots and flung himself down to sleep, repeating half aloud the parting words of the stranger:

"Remember! Worry makes poison in your system. Don't worry, muh boy, three Gordon daisies'll wipe out any worry in the universe."

Bernie laughed and closed his eyes upon worry. And probably his guardian angel, if present, wept.

Thus passed the night over the twain that love and hope had joined and poverty had put asunder — Rose Gubin's sophistry for Annie; for Bernie the specious balm of the "daisies."

Bernie woke next morning to the horrors of the Gordon daisies' aftermath. His spirit ached no less than his wretched head, for now in the cruel light of day and duty he saw the utter emptiness of life. But Annie would come back, he told himself as he grubbed about the kitchen for coffee. Of course she'd come back. What was a spat between man and wife who had lived together for eight whole years! She'd think better of it. He'd think better of it, too, and make a new arrangement about the money.

He had been wrong about that money. He saw it now. But he'd make things right. He'd earn more, too. That chap last night had told him things were looking up in all industries, and he was a newspaper fellow, and knew. What was his name, anyhow? And why, *why* had he made him drink those things!

Bernard was all contrition now — and physical misery. He held his temples and sipped his thin coffee out of his thick cup, trying to think out a definite plan of action that would restore them all to peace again. If Annie had been there at that moment she would have seen below the tousled exterior a glimpse of her old Bernie of the high heart, affectionate and full of plans for the future.

But Annie was behind Rose Gubin's counter, reading advertisements from the "Help Wanted Female" columns.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### OUT OF THE PAST

WHATEVER Annie may have felt toward the situation between herself and Bernie, whatever misgivings were at work in her heart, she wore upon the surface a fairly deceptive lack of expression. Probably no one but her Aunt Moggie would have sensed beneath her zealous manner the unnatural nervous tension that was there. But Aunt Moggie was not by to see.

The newspapers were rich with want ads. Rose was right. There were more chances than ever for women. A wave of exultation broke over Annie's spirit, leaving her tingling with eagerness to get into business harness again. It was a new chance to live. It was as if life having bade her choose some *one thing* from its great shop-window, and she having chosen and found it wanting, was being allowed to put it back, and make a second choice. The exhilaration was a little heady after all these meager years, like a cocktail taken on an empty stomach. After the manner of cocktails, it kept her from thinking of troublesome serious details.

It kept her from realizing, for instance, that the years had brought changes in business fashions as well as in millinery and motor cars. The "touch system" and the dictaphone had come into being while Annie was engaged in old-fashioned chores of housewifery. Efficiency experts and speed specialists, a novelty in the days of old man Simms, were now as much a part of office equipment as flat-topped desks with glass slabs.

It was not until some days had passed and Annie had called at more offices than she dared count, coming away

always without employment, that she began to sense her rustiness. In several of the places where she applied they gave her tests, which she plowed through with burning cheeks and fingers of ice, only to be curtly told they needed a "rapid and accurate operator."

"I could get my speed back in a short time," Annie hazarded in one office.

"Sorry, but we haven't time to practice in this place," said the brisk young woman in the outer room, without stopping her copying on the machine; "we gotta be experts from the start. It's war orders."

Forcing back the tears, Annie looked down at her hands. They were housewife's hands, mother hands. How different from clerical hands! They had completely changed their identity. They would have to be re-trained — led gradually back to their maiden deftness.

It was Rose's suggestion that she try something else.

"Look at this ad I found in to-day's paper," she offered, holding out the cutting between her stubby thumb and finger. "Girls and women! Light work in lithographing plant; good wages on 48-hour week, or piecework 35 cents an hour."

"Sounds good, don't it?" Rose pursued, fishing in her cash drawer for a stub of a pencil and beginning to figure on a paper bag. "Why, you could make, let's see, thirty-five an hour, eight hours a day, eight times five, forty and carry four, three eights twenty-four, and four — that's two-eighty a day; \$16.80 a week. Try it, Annie, why don't you!"

Annie could not tell Rose she hated the thought of factory work; and this sounded like factory work. She was already in Rose's debt to an extent that called for immediate settlement, in her eyes, although Rose would have bedded and boarded them indefinitely without a hint of payment.

She tried it next morning. The address was in a good neighborhood, a bit south of Gramercy Park, where giant

business buildings had sprung up, full of woolens and corsets and lithographs. The advertisement had given no name; merely "Call 11th floor." When Annie stepped off at eleven, she found the whole floor belonged to "Wallbach & Travis, Lithographers. Color Work. Posters and Art Displays."

There was a rail which enclosed a handsome rug, a desk with a pretty girl at it and a telephone on it, and leather covered settees on two sides where four or five young women were waiting. Beyond the oaken fence were acres of desks and girls and young men — people who had jobs. To the right was a row of glass-enclosed offices housing the heads of the business — people who gave jobs.

"Answering the ad?" said the girl at the desk to Annie, who nodded. "Have to wait a few minutes. Take a seat." And Annie sat down whence she could overlook the expanse of desks where employees worked so communally, and the glass-case offices where the employers worked so secludedly. She idly wondered which glass box belonged to Mr. Wallbach and which to Mr. Travis —

Travis? Travis? The name began to knock at Annie's mind. Then suddenly from out the welter of years rose a bright memory. It stabbed through her with the delicious pain a woman feels at recalling her first romance, no matter how wee and nipped and green a little bud that romance may have been. Annie's thoughts flashed back to her eighteenth year and her famished efforts to find pleasure at Miss Wells's Settlement House.

The entire scene reproduced itself in her mind like a "cut-back" in a movie film. The correctly furnished rooms with tables where girls sat reading. The pretty lamps. The piano, that Herbert Travis played. Herbert Travis himself, the first real man-of-the-world she had ever seen. How handsome he was, how perfectly dressed and mannered! And above all, how kind!

He had singled Annie out, rather, from the rest of the

grubby factory girls, asked her questions, told her of places and people, drawn her out and made her feel as if she might some day "be somebody"!

Then he married Miss Wells. And Annie's dream world crumbled. She felt a ghost of the old sick feeling, as she thought of it. Of course this was not the same Travis. Travis was a fairly common name. Still—in the old days he was an illustrator. He *might* have gone into commercial art.

It turned out to be exactly so. He married Miss Wells. Miss Wells had a great deal of money and a great many blocks of stock in this and that, left her by a highly successful father. Miss Wells, now Mrs. Travis, said one day, "Herbert, you know art, and you've got modern ideas. Why don't you reorganize that musty old Wallbach company that I've got so much stock in and put it on a paying basis? I do wish you would!"

And Mr. Travis, who was of ultra-modern thought and ambition, saw the advantage of renouncing his illustrator's income of a few thousands for the wealthy manager's income of many. His modernity, however, was not so quixotic as to pay inexperienced help \$16.80 a week, notwithstanding that Rose Gubin had figured it out on a paper bag.

No, indeed. When Annie's turn came to see the employment manager she was told she would earn about \$10 a week to start, but that she would "be rapidly increased when proficient." She controlled the sick sensation that came over her and took the place. She was ashamed to go home to Rose and her hospitable, becrowned flat without news of employment.

Followed days of sagging spirit to Annie. The exhilaration of her new adventure in life quickly died away. The work at Wallbach & Travis's was hard and uninteresting, and barely sufficed for a meager board to Rose with nothing left over. Poverty rubbed and rubbed. . . . The one gleam that lighted the path was the sense of *self*-dependence.

However poor their living, *she* was producing it. The humiliation of the grudging dole was gone.

Meanwhile the news of the break with Bernie was received with tears and reproaches by Mrs. Hargan. They did not end with one outburst, but strung along in a succession of tormenting scenes, leaving Annie's nerves raw and writhing.

Then came Aunt Moggie, down from the home of her suburban authoress, to pay a Sunday visit to the Carroll flat, and heard from Bernie the news of Annie's revolt. Into her gentle soul it plunged with shattering force. Yet if Annie had committed arson or treason or murder, or all three, Margaret Bailly would merely have folded her arms the tighter about her child. That she did not understand a thing, or sympathize with it, made no difference. If the thing involved Annie, that was enough to know. She would fly to her first and try to understand afterward. And if she never understood, her devotion would be all the more intense for being blind.

Bernie had recounted the story in sullen anger. His softened mood, meeting no molding fingers, had naturally hardened into bitterness. Ann could stay away now, for all of him. He was through. He'd been ready to fix things up and make amends. But she hadn't chosen to come back and talk things over. Very well, now she should have her way. Let her try and get along on her own! She'd find out, damn it all. . . .

Aunt Moggie flew, dazed and frightened, to her chick. In the Sunday quiet of Rose's little shop they talked.

"But, darling, Bernie loves you. Isn't there some other way? If you feel you must earn money, couldn't you —"

"No, no, I couldn't, dear! I know what you're going to say. That I could have stayed at home and done it! I tell you I couldn't. If I hadn't come away, things would have settled back into their old horrible unendurable rut. We were too close to see clearly. We were getting to hate each

other, Aunt Moggie. Oh, don't look so horrified, dear. I can't make you understand that living together — a man and woman — when everything is in a jangle and a mess — Bernie complaining, me resenting, the children drinking it all in, and everything we did getting on the other's nerves — oh — oh, I —"

"There, there, my dearie, don't cry, Nance! It only makes me feel my helplessness. If I was only younger — different — and had a home to offer —"

It was Annie's turn to comfort. She dashed the drops from her lashes and gathered the little, slim figure of her mother-aunt into her arms.

"Helplessness! Why, you blessed darling, the very *having* you to rely on for love and loyalty is my best help. You're my rock, my right hand. I wouldn't have you different in one wee bit of a way. You've kept me going all my life — living and working and hoping. And we're going to pull through this, as we have other things."

"Yes, dear." Margaret's was the dumb distress of one who serves by standing by and waiting. "Yes, dear," she repeated worriedly, "I suppose you must work it out yourselves. But I'm always right beside you, remember, ready to do anything I can?"

Annie kissed the anxious face and bidding her aunt good-by watched the thin figure as it left the shop and worked its way through the tenement crowds to the street car at the corner. Little, lonely, good Aunt Moggie, who found no shelter in spinsterhood from the storms of life, got none of the compensations that solaced even the unhappily mated! Aunt Moggie's distress over the situation merely added to the log-jam of emotions that began to press on Annie's reason.

It was into this fine mental log-jam that Mr. Herbert Travis suddenly dropped a charge of dynamite.

In a plant like Wallbach & Travis's, a ten-dollar work-girl might file in and file out daily for months without

glimpsing the men from the glass-case offices who made her place upon the payroll possible. But Annie made a mistake in something she had done, and stayed one Saturday afternoon hunting through a stack of vouchers in the head clerk's desk in the hope of straightening it out before it met the foreman's eye on Monday. It was also a mistake that caused Mr. Herbert Travis to turn his machine around at 72d Street and return to his office in the hope of straightening it out before it met his partner's eye on Monday.

In the far corner of the room, Annie had worked for an hour without locating the error which would probably cost her job. She had had no lunch, the day was sultry, and her head throbbed with the log-jam of thoughts that filled it. Tired and hungry and low in mind, her whole being was a sensitized plate inviting itself to be written on. It was the mood in which some people commit suicide, and some commit the complete turn-about which flings off the old order and turns wildly toward the new.

Across the many-acred room now untenanted save for one small feminine figure, head bowed on desk, strode Herbert Travis to his private office.

One look at Travis and you knew him for a man who loved appearances. Men who love appearances are usually not indifferent to the sex for whom appearances are mostly created. Travis was not. At thirty-two he had been kind to everybody, but particularly to the neglected. At forty-five he was still kind to people, but particularly to the attractive.

His wife had been exceedingly rich and moderately attractive. She had grown richer in thirteen years, but had not grown more attractive. Travis had. Always good-looking, he had now the distinguishing glory of prematurely gray hair, thick and sleek. His clothes showed at a glance their quality and perfection of cut. And they were just a bit different from other men's without your knowing why,

for they seemed impeccably conventional. Perhaps it was the way he wore them.

He had grown heavier than when he had sat on the arm of a chair at Settlement House and fascinated Annie with his chivalrous manners and his tales of Europe. But it only gave him a look of substantialness and success. He wore a narrow, tight-cropped mustache and a dab to match just beneath the middle of his lower lip, which faintly suggested the artist.

He caught sight of Annie, paused with his hand on the knob of his office door, and peered across the room with a questioning pucker between his eyes. Annie looked up, jumped up, bent forward, eyes wide, lips apart, one hand pressed to her throat in a way she had when anything startled her.

"Why, I do believe — it can't be — yes, it is — little Miss — Miss — now wait a minute —" Travis held up a finger to warn her not to tell him what the name was — "Hagen, wasn't it — down at the Settlement House!" And he went toward her, smiling, hand extended. Thus for the moment did Capital and Labor meet.

"Hagan," corrected Annie, almost too disquieted to speak. "How — how could you remember, Mr. Travis!"

She found both her hands in his, firmly held. Remember! Why, he couldn't forget *her*. He'd told Maud — Mrs. Travis — any number of times that that little Hagan girl was the most likely young person in the whole Settlement House.

It seemed to Annie as if he must sense the tumult in her veins. But if he saw her embarrassment, he seemed to enjoy it in a good-humored, half-teasing way, smiling down at her drooped lashes and the rose that surged to her face. With a final little squeeze, he dropped her hands and began a string of questions.

Whatever was she doing there? How long had she been

in the office? Why had he not known she was there? Why hadn't she told him? Weren't they the best of friends back in the Settlement House days — let's see, how long ago was that? Thirteen years! Good gracious, it couldn't be. And yet, well so it was! And what had she been doing and how had life dealt with her? But there! There was no time to talk it all over in the office. Annie must hurry and finish whatever she was doing and come in his car for a spin — it would rest her; she would enjoy it. . . .

Enjoy it! It seemed to Annie as if her whole soul melted into one great yearning. To give up utterly, if only for an hour, to bodily peace and mental comfort! She could come back afterward to her work . . . and her problems and her weariness. . . .

It was the first time Annie had been in any one's private motor car in her life. It was a small, swift roadster, built for two. Travis handed her into the low seat, noted the prettiness of her ankles as she stuck her poor little badly-shod feet straight out in front of her, and the loveliness of the pink in her cheek.

That she was excited and nervous and ill at ease, yet starving for the sweets the outing promised was plainly evident. Kindness welled up in him. He desired honestly to help her and give her pleasure. As he climbed in and wriggled to his place behind the wheel, he felt half benefactor, half wooer. It was novel, and a little stimulating.

Travis drove to an inn on a height overlooking the Hudson, where tables were set on the porch.

Annie sank into her chair in a half daze. She was headachy and worried, aquiver from the swift flight of the car, and acutely conscious of her taggy little clothes, her gloveless hands. But there were few to see, and Travis soon had her spirits uplifted with his kindly, cheerful talk — and the sandwiches and good strong tea he ordered.

He seemed to be studying her carefully while she nar-

rated her meager story with many hesitations and stops, bridged by his questions and sympathetic comments.

"— and — and I guess that's all," finished Annie, a sense of her present problems bearing down upon her; "all there is — and all there is to be. I'm not one of the people whose dreams come true."

Travis put out his hand and patted hers firmly as it lay upon the white cloth breaking bits of biscuit into crumbs.

"Absolute foolishness!" said he. "Little Mistress Carroll, shall I tell you how you can make your dreams come true? Very well. Now listen to me. The matter with you is simply that you don't see your own value. You are staying in the chorus when you could play a leading part. You are a day laborer. Using your arms where you should be using your fingers. Using your fingers when you should be using your brain.

"Why, I can hire any number of girls for your job. The reason life is so drab for such girls is that there are so many of them, never getting ahead, always competing against one another for their contemptible little jobs. Even skilled fingers can be easily hired. It's brains that are precious — and precious scarce.

"But, when I want to hire brains, and only brains, I get a man for the job. Even the man I get, to be of any use to me, must have been trained in my business. Now you have brains, but they're not specialized by training. What you have in perfection, though, and what men of means are willing to pay for even beyond the pay of department heads and business managers, is this — this *womanness* of yours, this subtle something that brings unstinted wealth to your Mary Pickfords, your Geraldine Farrars, your Pavlowas, your women novelists and 'sob sisters.'

"It isn't that what they do is done better than men can do it — men make mighty good movie actors and singers and dancers and writers — but that it is done differently, done in *woman's* way. It is the woman-feeling, the woman-

touch we want, the woman personality! Little Annie Carroll, success is for you if you want it."

A look of eagerness lighted Annie's face like a flash of sun; then went out, leaving her eyes like windows with the shades pulled down.

"But what could I do? How could I begin? I can't act or — or sing!" Annie smiled ruefully.

Travis hesitated for no longer than an eye wink.

"There's work for you to do. You've got your beginning, your trade. I need you in my office. I won't mind your shorthand being slow at first. You want to get on, Annie, to be independent and lift your head above dish-cloths and sweepings. Well, I'll give you the chance, the rest is up to you. The world is full of successful business women — isn't it?"

There was an hypnotic quality in his look and tone. Annie felt the old glow enveloping her, the old wild yearning to be of worth in this man's eyes. . . .

"Yes," she gasped in a rising tumult of sensations and memories. "But I — I'm thirty and —"

"No woman's at her best till she's past thirty." Travis's eyes smiled warmly and kindly into Annie's. "All the hard part is behind you. You have taken the step that makes you free. Now stay free and climb upward. Use your brains and your woman's personality and *earn*. Get into comfortable lodgings. Buy some clothes. Eat decent food. Give self-confidence a chance. Come"—he patted her hand again smartly—"wake up! Life's waiting!"

Annie felt an almost physical sense of being caught up on a great wave and borne along. It was heady and exciting. Visions of sunny seas and new worlds beyond danced before her eyes. Flotsam memories drifted by — of her wistful little self at seventeen, poor factory mite of Settlement House days, now being offered milk and honey in a golden dish!

Then came faint echoes of her father's words from long

ago: "You can do anything, Nancie, if you want it enough, and keep at it, and don't lose hope—"

And of her Aunt Moggie's, "I'll help you. Don't be frightened at the crossing. I'll take care of you, dearie—" And later, in the terrible factory days: "Only a little while longer, darling! Just stick, and presently we'll see the light. Remember, perseverance conquers all things."

Travis's motor was taking the bodily Annie home—to Rose's ghetto, Rose's crowded flat behind the store. But dreams were bearing Annie's spirit off and away to wondrous gardens of delight, full of the things she longed for, for the children and for herself, golden fruits of her own cultivation!

The stopping of the car jolted her back to a more familiar world.

"Au revoir, then, little lady! I'll have you transferred to my office on Monday." Travis was smiling and bowing, eager to make his escape from the swarm of youngsters who were crowding about his sleek roadster.

"Oh—Oh, *thank* you," murmured Annie, her soul kneeling in gratitude.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE GAYETY GIRLS

WHEN in a domestic upheaval the man picks up and leaves, the woman drops her head among the breakfast things and cries. Then she wipes her eyes upon her apron—and clears away the breakfast things. No matter how squeezed of joy her heart, she can still respond to the call of order and habit. Tears may fall into her dishpan; she may make her dinner of milk and crackers on the corner of the kitchen table; but her menage goes on after some fashion. The mere doing of her homely chores helps her to endure.

But a man deserted is a ship adrift. He has not the solace of tears nor the relief of broom and skillet, darning basket and kiddie meals. He has to make his fight handicapped and depressed by all the small litter of life—the soiled dishes, the crumby cloth, the tossed bed, the dusty floor, the frayed sock, the undone laundering.

It takes an exceptional man to buck successfully against the influence of three deserted and unkempt tenement rooms. Bernard tried hard. The night after his adventure with the newspaper Samaritan, he came home from work expecting his wife and babies to greet him. His own partially restored good nature and willingness to compromise the difficulty made him feel a speedy making up was likely.

When Annie did not come, Bernard set his teeth, crushed down his disappointment and went to Mrs. Hargan's with the well-intentioned program of bringing his family home. But his family was not there, and Annie's mother set his

nerves jangling with questions, ineffectual suggestions and complaints.

He returned to his desolate flat and made an effort to clean things up. Bernie had small talent for housework. He made his bed with one flap of the covers upward from the footboard, slinging the pillows into place at limp angles. He had eaten for his supper some odds and ends he found in the house, and now ran the cold water from the single faucet over the dishes and wiped them streakily on a soiled towel.

When he got through, the place looked like a sordid setting he had once seen in the Eden Musee's musty "Chamber of Horrors." He went to bed to drown his thoughts in sleep. For weeks he stuck doggedly to it, learning involuntarily the difficulties of the domestic struggle, just as Annie in her hunt for employment was getting insight into the industrial struggle.

Annie did not come home and Bernie's reaction set in. Annie was the voyager. She at least had the stimulation of new enterprises. Bernard was the stayer-at-home. He had nothing for hope to feed upon. There was nothing but toil and desolation.

"O—h, *hell!*" he snarled one night, and grabbed his hat.

The late daylight still gilded the streets. Bernie walked over to the docks, half hoping to meet the stranger Samaritan again. But he did not find him. He thought of idling up to the public school gymnasium, but the company there did not tempt him. He could go see his old grandmother. But he was loath to disclose his domestic derangement, and besides, Grandmother Carroll was not stimulating. How empty of friendship and cheer the world was!

Yet you could buy cheer. . . . If the convivial stranger was not at hand, at least the Rising Star Café was. . . . Perhaps he would be there. . . . Where was the place anyway? Down that street, and round the corner, surely he could find it. . . .

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She remembered. Coming out through the ugly exit, she glanced at the small collection of waiting men, fixed her eyes on Bernie with a studying gaze, and came straight toward him.

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"We'll go to the Chinaman's," she said. "Let's see —" she halted an instant, to think, "there's a reel good one around here some place. Oooh, yeah, I know — The Golden East, it's back this way. We can get a dish of 'chop.'"

But the name recalled something to Bernard that brought a catch in his pulmonary artery. The Golden East Restaurant and Chop Suey Parlor was where he and Annie had gone for their betrothal feast. For all his bitterness he could not now take Connie to the place his sweetheart days had hallowed.

"No—not there," he said a bit sharply.

"But it's the best place." Still hanging to his arm, she turned and looked up at him. "Oh—some personal reason—I get you. Well, I don't care where we go, only take me somewhere." And if Connie's sigh and vine-like clinging were simulated, she was a better actress than managers thought.

They found a restaurant and sat long over their commonplace meal, elbows on table, listening eagerly to each other's experiences since they had last met at Simms's. Connie was amazingly sympathetic. She was silly and flashy and vain and vacuous of mind. But she seemed to have gathered from somewhere a vague yearning for the quietes and refinements of life. Connie did most of the talking. Bernie's recital being without detail.

"I been married, too, you know," she narrated. "And what I got! Say, I used to wish I'd drawn a ribbon clerk or a man milliner — no matter what kind of a sissy so long as he was a *gentleman!* My aunt that I lived with died, and the man I married was a *beast*. Money, yes, so-so. But drunk eleven-tenths of the time, and as cruel as a Turk always. Gee—I'd give my right hand for a nice, kind, decent guy that made seven a week. I c'n make a living. But I've found out a living ain't everything. I guess—I guess what I want's a little kindness."

Connie looked down at her finger nails and bit her rouged lip. Bernie was afraid she was going to cry, and he hated to see women cry. He was perilously near her mood himself. He wanted — wanted like thunder — to have some one be kind. . . .

## CHANCE TO LIVE

"Well — I'm all invulnerable. You've got a right here to live here so far as I know and I'm as fit as well and a miser as — and everything in the calendar — but I tell you it is — and you know things are now with a load of bad conditions on your back and your pay being cut down doesn't — it's hard to master now say right the cost of maintaining you — yet mighty fine Connie, but I can buy a house — I'll never have one and then said I guess we're both — kind of — I mean warm and a bit of appreciation . . .

He turned to say he would walk over to Eighth Avenue and take a taxi to the

Connie lay silent, clinging to the bus ride and snuggled close to him in their side and the narrow rocking seat. Bernie reached up behind her and put his arm over the back of the bench as she had done at all the other couples did; and smiling to our pleasure.

It was just midnight when they got back downtown Connie's chamber located on East Fifteenth Street near Irving Place so as to be near the besiege houses. They walked up her door slowly arms linked.

"Bernardine do you love? Sixteenth? Why, we're neighbors. Listen — don't you get terribly lonely? And who takes care of the place for you? Say — is this thing permanent, the separation, I mean?"

Bernie had a way of asking half a dozen questions at once and one knowing if most of them went unanswered.

"I don't know," replied Bernard, referring to her last query.

Connie was the ideal exponent of Shaw's theory that woman does the pursuing. She leaned now against Bernie, with one of his hands clasped in both of hers in what might have been a goodnight clasp. And she touched his shoulder with her cheek, and sighed. The Gordon daisies to which the Samaritan of the docks had introduced young Carroll had not the headiness of this. Whatever else Connie was or wasn't, she was a soft, warm, feminine human creature, and she used her blandishments unsparingly and



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## A CHANCE TO LIVE

perhaps unconsciously to gain for her hungry little soul the "kindness" of a "reel gent'man."

Bernie swallowed something in his throat that made it difficult to breathe, moistened his lips and said huskily, "Good night."

Connie stared meltingly, her round lips parted softly, her eyes caressing him as he looked down at her. As he did so, the smear of powder and pink her cheek had left upon his coatsleeve caught his eye. It was a flash of daylight thrown suddenly upon a staged scene. His lips, instead of meeting Connie's upturned ones, pressed tightly together, then twisted into a little crooked smile. He squeezed her hand — and walked very quickly away.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**"BLACK AS THE PIT FROM POLE TO POLE"**

**C**ONNIE was both pleased and annoyed at Bernard's self-control. It was "gent'manly" of course. But was it altogether complimentary? Like every other virtue, gentlemanliness passing a certain point, ceased to be a virtue. The over-punctilious young man became what Connie called "a dub."

"I guess," said she to herself as she climbed the stairs to her close little bedroom, "he needs a little pep put into him."

Every night thereafter Miss Durant looked for Bernard at the stage door when she and the rest of the "Gayety Girlies" came out. When for several evenings he did not appear, she regretted poignantly she had not learned more definitely where he lived. She could not even jog him with a note.

And Connie was lonely these days. Things had been going badly, especially her love affairs. For a pretty girl, Miss Durant had been singularly unfortunate in love affairs. As the slavey remarked in the comedy "Good Gracious Annabelle," there was always "something the matter" with anybody who liked *her!*

The brute she had married drove her to a flirtation with a man penniless and worthless who was willing to live on her earnings. This in turn thrust her into friendship with an ancient Lothario who suddenly passed out, making no provision for the wistful lady who had at great sacrifice to her better feelings cheered his sunset path.

Connie, like everybody else, was a mixture of good and not so good. She had a vague instinct toward the sun-

shine and clean airs of life, but she was fitted neither by character nor education to provide them for herself. And she "had no luck." One side of her was always crying out for good times, white lights, gilded restaurants, fizz bottles, pretty clothes. The other side for rose-twined cottages and — and — well, something, she did not know just what. And not knowing what she did want, she became a leaf in the breeze, blowing this way and that.

At present Connie was sick of the "Gayety Girlies" and the johnnies with loud shirts and fat feet and heads, who came to woo. She was in one of her spells of yearning for domesticity. And here was Bernard Carroll drifting across her path just as she was at her loneliest, and he at his. He had once been susceptible to her blandishments, surely he should be again, Connie ruminated. Perhaps she had not gone about it right. Some fellows were funny that way; you had to study them. Men were awful prudes sometimes. . . .

But why hadn't Bernie been around again to the stage door? Maybe he had lost his job. Maybe he was sick. Oh, *why* hadn't she found out whereabouts in Sixteenth Street he lived! An idea struck Connie. She put on her hat and repaired to a drugstore, asked to look at the city directory and thumbed down the columns of Carrolls listed there.

There were hundreds of them. Three Carrolls resided in East Sixteenth but at last Connie found "Bernard Carroll" and his number, way over near Avenue "A."

Her idea was now formed. She would go to Bernie's flat, get into it somehow, set the place in order — it must be in a dreary mess, she figured — buy materials for supper, prepare and set forth the meal, and give Bernard the biggest and happiest surprise of his life when he should come home from work and find her there! Had he not told her how dreary it was getting his own meals? Was there not an adage that the way to a man's heart, etc., etc.? She

would hide behind the door and "Boo!" out at him. She would fling her arms about his neck and — and — Oh, the rest would be easy. What man could resist such an attack upon his heart and hearth?

As Connie struck eastward and the neighborhood grew worse and worse, she had to hold her mind firmly to the romantic side of the undertaking in order not to be discouraged by its uninvitingness. She found the house, went upstairs and knocked at random. A scuffle of feet inside, and the battered door was thrown open by the seven-year-old youngster of the milk driver whose family lived in the rooms adjoining the Carrolls'.

His mother had gone out, leaving the brood in his care. All five crowded forward to look at the magnificent being at their threshold.

"Hello, kids, know where the Carrolls live?" greeted Connie.

"Sure — right next door — right in here —" At least four of them answered at once, pointing eagerly and piling over one another in the effort to be first with the needed directions. Nothing like Connie had ever happened to them before. The lady on the lithographed calendar over the mantelpiece was no more colorful or magnificently clothed!

"They home?"

"No — Mis' Carroll's gone away and Carroll he's to work." The boy stared, big-eyed and fascinated.

"Oh, pshaw!" Connie registered the proper disappointment. "I'm Bernie Carroll's — er — sister from — the West. S'pose I could climb through the fire escape from your rooms, or anything? I want to be there when Bern gets home and surprise him."

"The key's there — right under the oilcloth." The child, delighted at being able to help, was quicker with his information than his mother would have been after one good glance at Connie. "Dey always leave it dere. I'll show yer!"

He found it, and ordered a "Gordon Daisy." But the beverage taken *au solitaire* had not its former magic. Moreover, the evening was warm and there were few hail-fellows about. No one spoke to him, and the "daisy" alone was unequal to the task of cheer. Feeling more dulled than uplifted, Bernard left the place and strolled westward toward Union Square.

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Annie threw back her head, opened her arms wide and smiled on a long, inhaling breath. It was good, it *was* good — if only — If only what? Nothing. Nothing at all. Only she must keep working hard, hard, never pausing, never stopping — just working.

It had been a busy day at the office. She was tired with incessant effort. So feverish had been her zest, indeed, that Travis had once looked up from his desk, studying her with his quiet half-smile, and calling:

"I say, why the furore! Don't bother with those details. Let the girl outside copy the specifications. Come over here and help me choose a design out of this stack. It's your woman judgment I'm hiring, not your fingers. The girl outside can beat you at typewriting without even a pause in her gum-chewing. But she'll never get more than twelve a week. . . ."

And he had laughed. And Annie had laughed.

If ever a breath of misgiving tarnished the bright surface of her joy-in-work, it was as momentary as a gust of wind across a millpond. She was still under the influence of a complex excitement — her leaving of Bernie, her struggle with the want ads, her lapse into despair and the sudden rescue as she was going down for the last time. It all merged into delightful ethers that drugged her mind to pain. The nitrous oxide was still in her nostrils. She laughed, and found her labors play. She had not yet returned to the world of fact with its inexorable laws of take and give.

She had not even realized that on this busy day at the office she was constantly having to pull her mind back to its path of business. That it was straying badly into fields inhabited by three little children and a lonely man. Even now, she did not know she was working with mad haste, and that she jumped when the telephone rang in the shop, or somebody banged the door. When her spirits sagged ever so slightly, she had only to recall Travis's prophecies

for her future to feel freshly elated, borne upward on an ever-rising wave.

The door opened, slamming smartly against a chair.

"Oh, how you startled me, Rose!" Annie turned, her hand at her throat, to see not Rose at all, but her little Aunt Margaret, face tense and white, eyes beseeching.

"Why, darling!" Annie rushed to her. "What is it — anything happened to — to mother? Tell me quickly, dear — what is it? Or is it Bern?"

"No — not your mother — it's Bernard. He isn't ill, but come, dear, come with me, please. I'll tell you on the way."

"Nancie —" they were on the train now, speeding up-town from Rose's ghetto to the old tenement flat, and Aunt Moggie was speaking with a vehemence Annie had not known in her before, "you know that I love you as my own child — don't you?"

"Oh, dearest, yes —"

"And that I want your happiness more than anything in life?"

Annie nodded wordlessly.

"Well, dearie, I've brought you up here to make a choice. You must decide now, and quickly, where your happiness lies. I — I'm not even — quite sure, Nance, that it isn't too late —"

"You mean there's — some one *else*?" Annie's voice was hardly more than a breath, she gripped her aunt's hand till it hurt.

"I mean he's just a wretched, unhappy boy, dear, who needs love and mothering. Encouragement will lift him up. He's got to have it. If he has yours, he's saved. If not yours, then somebody else's. A man can't live in loneliness and despair any more than a woman can. He needs a woman's faith to give him faith in himself."

"You've seen him then, Aunt Mog?" whispered Annie.

"I've been doing what I could, dear — looking after the place a bit, waiting to see . . ."

Annie bit her quivering lips and stared out of the car window at the dark streets with their home-lighted windows, the glow of a few late shops. A surge of longing for something that once had been swept through her.

She said nothing, and Aunt Moggie went on in her low, ardent tone, as the train clattered on.

"If you are really satisfied and happy with your work, let that be your choice, for you've proved your capability. I would be the last one, my darling, to urge a sliding back. It's only that I don't want you to follow the business career *at too great a cost*.

"I know how empty and bloodless the business life for women is *when she has nothing else*. I have had nothing else ever. But you have. And once you have known love and motherhood, you cannot un-know them. Nothing else can have its full value, dear, for *you*. Look into your heart — can it?"

Annie still was silent, her thoughts turned inward.

"I want you to have the fullest, sweetest life," went on the older woman softly. "I want you to have *both* love and work. Can this — other man give them both to you?" She felt Annie shudder against her arm. "He himself," Margaret went on, gathering courage, "has found life tasteless without love. His wealthy marriage, his power in the business world, what real joy have they brought him? You may not see it, dear, maybe even he does not, but he means to have —"

Annie stopped her with a quick gesture.

"Don't, Aunt Mog — I can't stand it! Come — here's our station."

The women hurried toward the old familiar tenement. It was nearing midnight and the streets were still, the streets of tired laboring folk. Only a marauding cat stirred

here and there, clinging with scraggy toes to a barrel's rim. . . .

A line of light showed under the Carrolls' door. Breathlessly Annie bent her ear for sounds within. Nothing. Very softly she turned the knob and pushed the door open an inch or two. The place smelled of the oil lamp burning low and smoking. Beside it, arms outstretched upon the table, tousled head between them, was Bernard, asleep.

Bernard asleep pled his cause well. In his still hands, flung wrist on wrist, the strained lines of his coatsleeves, his huddled shoulders whose brawn had failed a little under burdens, the trailing feet, was something the look of the dead upon the battlefield. Without movement or sound, he cried for help, for mercy. . . .

Annie's heart heard the call. With the sweep of a homing bird she flew toward him while Margaret's trembling hand closed the door. It was characteristic of her to stay outside and wait.

There was an instant's silence. A scuffling sound. A bewildered "Who's that — what is it!" — as if from lips half muffled. A quavering "Oh, my boy,—" just the tone Aunt Moggie had heard Annie soothe her children in. And one wild, hoarse cry from Bernard — "*Nance!*"

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE SOAPBOX MAN

LITTLE Aunt Moggie, yearning to know her children were finding their way back to the haven of each other's love, waited patiently in the hall. Waited and listened. Came presently the murmur of Annie's voice, caressingly gentle. And Bernard's in responsive timbre. Then the quaver of coming tears — but not tears of misery. The soft relieving woman-tears that are called tears of joy. Margaret leaned against the wall, hands to face, breathing her thanks to her own good God.

The door opened and four young arms reached out for her, drew her into the room and folded her close by two and two. There seemed nothing that lips could say, except by kisses.

"Now my dears, good night," said Margaret when she had been held close by Annie, and drawn away by Bernard like a popular girl who must divide her dances, and passed back again to her first partner. "Good night. I'm going down to Rose's and stay with the children."

She spoke with a note of authority which by its very unusualness fended off dispute. They walked to the car with her. And the dirty tenement street was carpeted with the roses of their love.

"I'll bring them home in time for school," she said, refusing to be accompanied further, "— in time for breakfast — all of us together. Good night, dears."

And the conductor yanked the bellrope, sleepily unconscious that he was ringing down the curtain upon an act of

very real drama. After all, it is the conductors and elevator runners and telephone girls and policemen and messenger boys and postmen who stage-direct the comedy of life.

It was a queer, wakeful night that Annie and Bernard had. Both were heavy with the weight of problems. Both avoided mention of what had happened during their separation, as any wounded creature protects its wounds from touch. Shyness set up its barrier. Yet through the night, awaking from troubled dreams, each stretched out a hand many times to make sure the mate was really there. . . .

A shaft of early morning sunlight gilded the ugly old vacant lot back of Annie's tenement and reflected itself in her waking eyes. She lay quietly smiling as her glance traveled round the familiar, shabby room, and then to the long white mound beside her which was Bernie.

It seemed very strange to be there instead of in Rose's back room, with the kiddies disposed in their makeshift beds and the crowded hurry of the morning before her. She seemed to have gone back ten years to her bridal days, with the thrill of young housewifery making her heart beat, and the glamor of newness over everything. Then, coming to full consciousness, she remembered the program laid out for that history-marked morning, and gently slid to the floor. Bernie half-wakened, reached out a hand for her, found the soft pad of her shoulder and slipped back contentedly into sleep.

Annie bathed and dressed and quietly stole down the rickety stairs to do her breakfast marketing. For this breakfast was to be a festival, glorified with fruit and eggs and much good cheer. . . . For the time, all vexatious problems were to be put aside. Aunt Moggie and the children were coming HOME, and it should be as home should be — a refuge, a place "of sweet repast and calm repose."

As she hurried along toward First Avenue, she had half the feelings of a newcomer in the neighborhood, half the

feelings of a prodigal returned. The coal and ice man coming up from his cellar, smiled and said "Good-a-morn'." The grocer at the corner greeted her as though she had been on a trip to Europe and just returned to renew her patronage. He was New Yorkish enough to ask no questions, and Annie squandered an extra quarter in animal crackers and oranges out of sheer gratitude.

They had a merry meal. There was much excited chatter. But it might have been the reunion after a trip away. Children take all things adventurously, caring little for the motive power that moves the play. Aunt Moggie and Annie and Bernie, as if by tacit agreement, played up the play and concealed the wheels that went round behind it.

The children were packed off to school, tickled at being in the neighborhood of their cronies and not having to ride up in the car from Rose's ghetto. Aunt Moggie kissed Annie and Bern and departed to her suburban authoress. Annie bestirred herself with great zeal to fix her man his festal lunch-parcel, made luscious with two boiled eggs and an extra-wet jam sandwich wrapped in oiled paper for desert.

And when at last the flat was still, Annie began over her breakfast dishwashing to think out what she could no longer postpone the thinking of. At nine o'clock she went to the telegraph office on Second Avenue and sent a message to Travis: "Cannot come to work to-day. Explain to-morrow. A. Carroll." She felt unequal to telling him voice-to-voice by telephone why she would not be at her desk. For one thing, she did not know what to say. She would have to think and think and think. . . .

All day she worked about her little flat, a strange new glamor over all she did, an uneasy questioning stirring always in the back of her mind. What had Aunt Moggie found out that she had not told her? What fear had sent her down at night to summon her home? What danger threatened? In sheer self-defense, Annie ensconced her-

self in the present. She resolved to relax utterly and wait for things to unkink themselves.

That evening after the supper dishes had been cleared—and Bernie helped with new vigor to clear them—Annie suddenly felt herself drawn forward and upward in a warm embrace. She snuggled into it, closing her eyes luxuriously, relaxing her lips to those that pressed them.

"Come on, girl," whispered Bern, holding her close, his face bent down to hers, "I guess we've both been kind of crazy—I know I have! Let's get out somewhere. I'll go down and get Sammie Rafetzky to come up and stay with the kids. Put on your things, that's a dear, eh, Nance?"

They walked west through Sixteenth Street to Stuyvesant Square, where a few people were trying to think the chill evening held a promise of spring. They went through the Square and along Fifteenth Street, across Third Avenue toward Union Square. Neither found it easy to talk, yet each longed to find a way to begin. Instinctively they looked around for some neutral ground or distraction.

A street speaker was holding forth in the space between the Lafayette and Lincoln statues so often preëmpted by cure-all fakers and orators of the soapbox. There was a goodly crowd about him, and this offered a means for breaking the conversational ice.

"That fellow's got an audience, anyhow," remarked Bernard.

"What's he talking about?" asked Annie.

"Oh, the labor movement or socialism or something. Look at the way he yells and flaps his arms!"

"Let's go over and hear what he's saying. We may as well walk through Fourteenth Street, anyhow." Annie always liked the lights of the shops and dairy lunchrooms and the posters outside the moving picture theaters.

The man was young, slim and wiry, with a good-looking dark face and eyes that shone with earnestness. He had a thick mane of hair, which he kept tossing back. His speech

had the accent of one who has mastered English after maturity. Annie noted that it was like Mrs. Rafetzky's and Rose Gubin's mother's. His voice was hoarse with much outdoor speaking, and as he shouted out the main points of his appeal the cords of his neck swelled and he pounded a work-worn hand upon the railing of his little platform. There were two small flags fastened behind him, one of solid red, the other the familiar Stars and Stripes.

"I tell you, friends," he said in quick staccato, "when poverty comes in at the doorway, love flies out of the window!"

The Carrolls caught each other in a quick exchange of glances and involuntarily moved further into the crowd. The man's words seemed chosen and squarely aimed at them. They could not help thinking he must know them — Bernard and Annie — be familiar with their most intimate trouble, and aware of how barely they had escaped being the living embodiment of the truth of his words.

*Had they escaped?* Annie's heart questioned with a leap of terror. As though in answer, Bernie's fingers closed crushingly about her own, sending a tingle through her from head to foot. The speaker went on, repeating at intervals his phrase "When poverty comes in at the door —"

Yes, truly he knew their story, the story of the sodden and embittered poor, better than they knew it themselves. For often, as in the Carrolls' own case, husbands and wives thought they hated each other when it was only the poison of poverty that corroded them. Annie knew. . . . She had seen the look in the women's faces, heard their stories, sensed the tragedies that need not have been tragedies but for this bitter thing called poverty.

She and Bernie both saw the truth now. This wild-haired man on his soapbox had made them see it with his street orator's words. It was not that they had lost in love for each other. Only that they had lost heart, lost the power to bear and forbear.



"It is terrible, poverty," thought Annie, "but now that I see it in its workings, I find there's one thing it cannot do . . . ."

She groped again for Bernie's hand, found it, and the two hands clung together in a sentient thrill of love.

"And why do we have this poverty!" went on the speaker, flinging his hoarse voice over the crowd. "I'll tell you why. It is because you are slaves. You think you live, love and think as freemen. But you are wrong. All over the world, the man who owns your job, owns you — body, mind, heart and soul. You do as he says and take what he gives for fear of losing your job! If you lose your job you lose your love in time. What love, no matter how fine it is, can stand the constant nagging, nagging, nagging of hunger, cold, debts, discouragement, poor clothes, dinginess, the prospect of a poverty-stricken old age?"

Annie was holding tightly onto Bernie's arm as the speaker seemed to address himself to her and Bernie.

"And so you take what the man who owns your job chooses to give you. You're not free. If your boss says work twelve hours, you work twelve hours or you lose your job. If your boss and his class think they aren't making profit enough, they cut down on the output so as to hike the price up, and put you on half time! What have you got to say about it? If you quit, some one else will grab your job!

"Some men get together and decide to boost the price of milk. Your baby has got to be fed. How do you meet the hoist in price? You go without food yourself so's to pay it, or you buy cheap milk and your baby sickens. Who cares? And what are you going to do about it?

"Or a coal company wants more dividends for its stockholders. They boost the price of coal. Instead of paying twelve cents for your bucket of coal you got to pay fifteen. You're buying your coal at \$35 a ton! And what are you

going to do about it? They play the fiddle and you dance! Your dance may be the dance o' death, but life's cheap. Go ahead and die!"

He stopped a moment to gulp a glass of water, and in the pause his words reechoed—"Go ahead and die!"

How near she and Bern had come to it, the worse-than-physical death. It was only lucky chance that had brought them together again. What of the thousands of others to whom rent day was a bugaboo and a theater ticket unknown? Who bought coal by the pailful, and "loose" milk blue and dirty, ladled from the grocer's can? Everything in hand-to-mouth quantities because they must buy it that way or go without. But the man was talking on, and she wanted to hear:

"And I tell you, friends, it is not only the laborer with the calloused hands who is exploited by the few who hold all the money and all the power. It's the clerks and bookkeepers, the office help, the fellows who wear starched collars to work and think, therefore, that they are not laborers. But they're even worse off. The laborer has his union to help him fight. But these poor fellows, these white-collar slaves, have no one to help bear their burden.

"They're as necessary to the community as the laborers and the man higher up. Yet with 60 per cent. rise in the cost of living in the past few years, these poor devils still get no more than what they were getting five years ago!

"A clerk is expected to make a decent appearance. He is told he must save for the rainy day and provide for his family's future. He may even have his own notions of what a home should be and how his wife and children should be given their chance to live! How can he give it to them? What chance has he? The answer is—none! At least, not under this present system!

"A bricklayer is a specialist," the man went on. "Bankers are financial specialists. But millions of men in between

are not specialists. They never get a chance to be. Maybe they weren't strong enough even to swing a pick because they didn't get enough food when they were children. I know plenty of children who never had a squarer meal in their lives than bread and weak coffee or tea! Fine food for kids, that is!"

Annie said "No!" out loud, without knowing she spoke.

"Fine chance the poor in the tenements have to bring up their children healthy with men allowed by law to buy up foodstuffs and store them out of reach in order to keep up prices! Fine chance a man has to earn a living with twenty men fighting for every job, willing to work twelve hours a day with a pittance for their labor. Life's cheap! Let them sicken and die. Some one else will take the place. Let their children starve slowly before their eyes, go to school without breakfasts, fall asleep on their desks, shiver with cold as they walk home with broken shoes through the slush! Fine chance these kids have to grow up and earn the good wages people are always telling us are waiting for the man who has ability!"

"You can't have ability, brothers and sisters, if you've got neither health nor education. You can't have health and an education with every man cutting every other man's throat for a job — for a bare living.

"Fat bankers will tell you the poor are to blame for their poverty. Now let *me* tell you what's to blame for it! It's because a few men are masters and the rest are slaves!

"If you don't want a few men to own all the milk and all the meat and all the coal and all the decent places to live, and all the jobs and all the money in the world, then let us have a system where no man is master of another man. And the man who owns the necessities of your life is your master! Let us have done with the private ownership of the means of life. Let's do away with the waste and the wickedness of competition that forces a decent man to be-

come either a criminal or a slave! Let the necessities of life be owned by the government — and let the government be owned by the people!"

The street orator brought his speech to a close soon after, stepped down and was lost to the Carrolls' view. The crowd broke up and moved off in all directions. Bernard and Annie gravitated toward brightly lighted Fourteenth Street. It was not until they had walked nearly to Third Avenue that either of them spoke. They were passing a candy store.

"Come on, Ann, let's get something," Bernie said, as though shaking off heavy thoughts.

It was a commonplace speech enough. But it signified much. Annie knew how much. It was a long time since Bernie had offered to buy her sweets or treat her to a soda. With a slight, swift pressure of his arm she turned into the shop, a smile on her lips. That they couldn't afford even this small luxury was no deterrent. It made the tribute all the dearer. Few men proffering pearls ever conferred more pleasure than Bernie with his humble gift.

"Wonder what that fellow was, anyhow?" said Bernie. "Did you see any sign on his platform?"

"No, I wasn't near enough to notice," murmured Annie absently, realizing how delicious it was to be linked upon Bern's arm again.

"Said some fine things, didn't he? Hit me right in the solar plexus."

"Yes." Annie was thinking — a good deal about the speaker, but still more about their reconciliation. That was the outstanding great fact after all — they were friends again. Oh, the comfort of being friends again!

Deep in their thoughts as they were, neither of them noticed a young woman who came almost abreast of them as they turned east from Third Avenue into Sixteenth Street, nearing home. It was Connie Durant, fresh from the "Gayety Girlies," all a-hurry and all a-hope of finding

Bernard in. Not even a practiced eye could have told that the fat parcel contained a delicatessen repast of "weenies" and potato salad, and that the other one, which clinked slightly, was two small "Extra Specials, Dry."

Even before Connie saw the Carrolls walking there towards home, with arms entwined, the sentry in each woman's soul which is forever watching out for what the next hour holds of joy or pain, had sent a signal that pain would be her portion. Connie called it "a hunch" and had been telling herself "I betcha he won't be there. Sump'm tells me it'd be just my luck!"

This was worse than his not being there. For this spelt the end of the chapter. It was in Connie's code to know "where to get off." This was where.

Had she been less hardened by life, less used to sudden thwacks from Fate, had she not armored herself with a crude philosophy that never deserted her for long, she would have cried out at this picture which told the Carrolls' story. As it was, she followed them a few paces, a bitter smile curving her soft, too-red lips. Then she turned back, and as she crossed the street at an angle, flung the packages into the nearest waste-barrel, laughing aloud.

As the Carrolls climbed their dark staircase, Bernie put his arm about his wife's shoulder, his hand over hers, following it as it moved up the baluster.

"Ann."

"Yes, dear?"

"D'you remember that girl that used to work at Simms's — Connie Durant?"

"Mm — hm —"

"Well, I met her a while ago. I want to tell you about her. She's —"

"She's nothing to us, Bern, is she? Well, then, let's — let's *not*."

And they opened their door into the light, tired Sammie Rafetzky poring faithfully over his history book under

the oil lamp, while the small Carrolls slept. He was released from his nursely duties, given a quarter and sent yawning down home to bed.

Annie did not sleep that night. The ferment of thought the street speaker had stirred in her mind, her own problems, and the little shadow of Connie, all combined to keep her staring wideawake. She must contrive her answer to Travis before another day passed. The spirit of this answer, if not the form, she already knew.

She would not go back.

She felt that if she wanted to find reasons for her decision she could do it. But she did not want reasons. She was content just to feel her action right. And it was right, she was clear, clear, yes, and eager on that point.

But it was another matter deciding what to do about working for some one else. Travis had sketched an enticing future which was, he insisted, hers to command. Yet with her brain whirling in search for some definite, concrete thing she could do to bring that future to realization she found herself oddly baffled.

Travis had said many plausible things, lifted veil after veil of doubt and discouragement and revealing gardens of prosperity and delight. But just how, come to think of it, had he told her to go about reaching those gardens? She saw them vividly. But not the paths to them. She had not noticed before there were no paths in the foreground. With her hand in his friendly one, it had seemed so easy to *fly* to those gardens. Never mind paths. . . .

The torment of the ever-evading solution sent Annie into the grip of a waking nightmare.

But dawn brought light and coolness into her fevered mind. She knew Travis's words now for what they were — mere words. She saw now that comfort, career, a charming ease of success in business for her lay only with Travis.

Any other employer — how well she remembered the stern old Simms — would demand of her the hard, cold coin of skill. Skill, training, experience in his special line. Mere intelligence would not be enough, or “that indefinable something that means woman,” of which Travis had so confidently spoken. Fluff and rubbish! Whatever value she had “as a woman” belonged to Bernard and to her children. . . .

With a long sigh of relief, Annie relaxed her tense body and waited for sleep. It was blessed to know at last, to see clearly, to have reason and experience and instinct and heart, all agreed, one. . . . She closed her eyes and sank away from consciousness.

But in the morning she was plain Cinderella again, with her grubby tasks and her tableful of thick, chipped china, her cheap coffee, and tiresome, endless gruel. She sighed as she thought of the trim office at Travis's, the pleasant work, the oasis of lunch-hour at the dairy restaurant — all the details of the enspiriting business world as against the drudgeries of home. She sighed again to think how little she would be missed in Travis's world. . . .

As Bernie's frayed cuff reached over the table for his second cup of coffee, a little stab of love and pity, of hope, regret and resolution — a very complex little stab indeed — shot through Annie.

“Bern —” she began crisply. “I've had a job, you know, these past weeks.”

“I know it, Nan. I've been too cowardly to ask about it. I've always known in my heart you were the smartest woman and the best one that ever blessed a dub of a man. You can do anything you set your mind to. You've got me beat ten ways. But, by God, Nance, I'll show you yet! I've got my second wind. I'll work day and night. I'll make a better living or I'll — I'll —” he clenched his fist and set his teeth hard, making the muscles play about his

lean jaw. "If you'll just stick, dear," he added in a different voice, coming round the table beside her chair.

Annie winced. Again the thought flashed to her of how easily she could be spared in her office. And again she thought of Aunt Moggie's word: "He just needs love and mothering —"

"I'll stick," she whispered, her cheek against Bernie's hand. And after a pause in which came an ache to her throat and a mist to her eyes, she laughingly added: "If ever I take a job again, it'll be only an hour or two each day, or some nice little thing I can do at home, like taking in stoops to scrub or windows to wash. And, Bern! Wait just a minute, will you, dear, while I write a note to my boss and have you post it, special deliv."

He nodded emphatically, and kissing her, loitered around while she penned her parting with Travis and the seductive dream he had woven out of desire and words.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE PROTEST OF MOTHERS

A FEW days later Annie, on her way down to see Rose Gubin, chanced upon a little curtain-raiser to the melodrama of suffering which had been in preparation upon the East Side for months. Annie had just enough knowledge of "uptown" methods to know that when a customer there is overcharged at his provision store he protests, amiably or otherwise, according to his disposition. The matter is explained or not, according to the disposition of the proprietor. If the adjustment is not satisfactory, the uptowner takes his trade elsewhere. That ends it, except that if the price is still extortionate the prosperous citizen complains that "the cost of living is becoming something outrageous — but what are you going to do about it?" And he does nothing, except compare sympathetic notes with friends.

With an East Side housewife it is different. Her methods are direct. When onions that have been costing four cents are raised to five on all the pushcarts that choke her familiar streets, her protest is made in no uncertain terms. She cannot trade at the shops because pushcart prices are all she can afford. The onions must come down to four cents, or she must go without the onions.

So long as onions are not indispensable she renounces onions, or, haggling and fuming, buys as many as she can for her four cents. When her five-cent loaf of bread, however, costs suddenly seven; when the milk she must have for her children is increased to fourteen cents a quart, she does not stop at haggling, she fights. Her primitive mother

## A CHANCE TO LIVE

instinct, fanned by her native emotionalism, becomes a sweeping flame.

It was upon the kindling of one of these flames that Annie chanced, turning into the ghetto street where the Gubins lived. A stout woman with a shawl was negotiating at a peddler's stand for potatoes. Her voice was suddenly raised to furious anger. The bearded huckster matched her tones with his own. As the dispute fulminated other women stopped on the crowded pavement, listening sympathetically—sympathetically, that is, to the woman. A few joined in. Others gathered round until the street became impassable at that point.

"*Gozlan!* Robber of my children!" cried the woman, waving a potato-armed fist in the peddler's face. A wild chorus of protest in Yiddish followed. Dozens of other women, whose wrath had been smoldering for days, burst forth with a vigor born of their desperate plight. Heads poked out from windows. Customers ran from little neighborhood shops in the midst of their buying. They, too, had been haranguing and shaking angry fists at dealers who dared charge seven cents for bread.

The crowd thickened until Annie, shoved and prodded by matrons twice and thrice her size, shrank into a doorway to wait and see if the thing should not end as suddenly as it began, and her path to the Gubin shop be opened.

The excitement, however, was not quite of the casual sort she had seen before. Like her quarrel with Bernie, it was the bursting forth of many pent-up grievances. The more they talked the more their anger grew. A tornado of rage was soon sweeping the women out of all self-control. Ear-splitting clamorings in Yiddish and English dinned through the air. Boys began to catcall, babies to cry. The hoarse shouts of hucksters rumbled through the feminine chorus.

The mob swayed back and forth. Frenzied pushcart merchants strained to save their property. There was no longer any center to the multitude. The woman who had

started it was lost to Annie's view. Every one was pushing, waving arms, shouting protests and suggestions for a remedy.

Suddenly an alarm was raised that the policeman was coming. The mass of women with the helpless peddlers in the center of it, tightened and surged in the opposite direction. A pushcart upset. The fruit and vegetables were crushed under foot in an instant. The maddened housewives raised a shout of triumph, and several other carts were willfully pushed over, their wares trodden viciously in the filth of the gutter, while the sellers tore their beards and raised a wail to heaven.

Three policemen, with shouts and club wavings, shoved the crowd before them. Annie saw a woman detach herself from the thick of the press, spring upon a pile of boxes in front of a provision store. Waving her hands for silence, she began speaking rapidly in Yiddish.

"It's the leader! It's the leader!" Annie heard several quick whispers, with pointings toward the stocky figure on the boxes.

It took her but a few seconds to make her plea.

"Here, you women!" was something of what she said, "How long will you stand this treatment! Let us go down to the millionaire mayor of this city and tell him our children are starving, that we are being robbed, that his policemen break our heads because we make our protest! Come! I will take you. Come as you are. Come now! I will talk for you. I will tell him he must give us bread!"

"Hey, there, get down outer that and stop your noise!" shouted a bluecoat, as he and his allies worked their way to where she stood. "Cut that talk! It won't do you no good." He didn't know what she was saying, but he guessed it closely. It was "some kind of mischief" she was plotting, and that was enough.

"Remember — *to-day!*" the woman flung her final word and scrambled down from her makeshift platform.

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Little by little the assemblage melted into its tenements and by-streets. The pushcart men, calling upon Jehovah to witness their ruin, salvaged what they could of their stocks, raking the gutters with trembling hands. Urchins beset them with jeers and pranks. The policemen stood around for a while with an air of half-good-humored severity, and then disappeared one by one.

Annie moved on, through little knots of chattering women, to Rose Gubin's shop. Rose was excited over the afternoon's happening.

"Come in the back," said she, "and let's drink a glass of tea! I'm all upset. Worse is yet coming! Did you see the paper? We're going in the war, woe is us! Shuh—" And Rose laid her palms to her temples and rocked in wordless eloquence.

"I didn't see it," said Annie, sitting down at the table with the brown-mottled oilcloth cover in Rose's living room while her hostess bustled around making tea. "Of course it means more trouble."

"Trouble! Ach! But listen, I don't blame those women out there. They blame me, though. They blame every one that sells. They don't understand *we* have to pay just the same as *they* do. I'm crazy with the price of things. They yell when I ask forty-eight cents for eggs, and me making two cents a dozen profit. It's the same with the smoked fish. Half the time I can't even get it. And if my customers can't get it, they go somewhere else to buy. I got to charge six cents a loaf for the small white bread. I ain't allowed to sell it less.

"It's the same with everything I got in my store. I don't make a profit on half the things in stock, Annie. It's the truth, *I should live so!*" Annie smiled at Rose's colloquial expression and gave her shoulder an affectionate squeeze.

"I believe you, dear. And I'm sorry for those women out there, too. I see their side of it. They've got just so much to spend, and if they haven't got it they can't get it!"

It's that way with me. Oh, Rose, I get so discouraged sometimes. Do you suppose they'll go down to the mayor's office, like that woman said?"

"Sure they will, and luck to 'em! I know her. She's determined. She's always getting up something. A worker for women's voting and all that. She'll lead them there, you see." And the talk shifted to other things. For the time they forgot the incident of the "bread riot."

Soon, however, their attention was attracted by unwonted noises in the street. Rose, called by her daughter, went into the shop, returning quickly with word that the women, sure enough, were gathering for their march upon city hall. Rose and Annie went to the shop door to look. There was the "leader" getting her following into a semblance of line. The women, some bareheaded, some with shawls, a few with babies in their arms — babies that looked so miraculously ruddier and better fed than their mothers — were excited and voluble, impatient to be off.

"I'd go if I dast leave the store," said Rose. "Why don't *you*?"

"Oh, I can't. I must get home to the kiddie. It's nearly four. I left her with Sammie Rafetzky; the boys are playing in the lot. I'll have to go."

Annie started off toward the car, deciding to spend an extravagant nickel and save time. Pushing through the lookers-on who cluttered the sidewalk, she got clear of the press and was well down the block when she suddenly found herself caught in an onmoving throng. The delegation to the mayor's office had abruptly got under way and were sweeping along, dragging fringes of men and women who hurried along upon the sidewalk, a sort of convoy, encouraging the marchers upon their errand.

The procession was of goodly size, quieter now and resolute under the admonishments of the leader. At first Annie was caught in the suction and carried along. Later as the throng swung into broad Delancey Street she could



C. A. W. S.

"Don't hesitate! March straight on and follow me!" ordered the leader of the motley band.

have escaped and caught her car for home. But something urged her to continue and see what happened. She had been thinking constantly of the problems of the poor and of her own in particular ever since she and Bernard heard the soapbox orator. Bernie, even more keenly interested than she, brought home some leaflets one night, handed out by another street speaker, and together they pored over them. From these Annie learned that Socialism was the name of the doctrine propounded by the speakers and by the leaflets.

Fragments from one of the handbills floated through her mind as she allowed herself to be magnetized into the throng of marching women: "You must own the tools of industry before bread will be secured to you." "You live under a system of society where the few revel in luxury and the many labor in the sweat of their brows for daily existence." None of it was quite clear to Annie, yet she connected it somehow with the demonstration of which she was now a part.

A woman grasped her arm and drew her vigorously into line with the tramping housewives.

"Come on — come with us," she cried, "help us get our rights — food for our starving children!"

The queer army came to the Bowery and turned southward, amid the stares and jeers of puzzled onlookers. At Chatham Square it veered off into Park Row, rounding the Municipal building and crossing westward to city hall. A few policemen looked doubtfully at the strange procession, but did not stop it.

"Don't hesitate. March straight on and follow me!" ordered the leader as with her motley band she entered the little park where stands the mayor's official abiding place. Motormen in surprise stopped their cars. Hundreds of pedestrians paused to gaze. Half a dozen policemen, hesitating no longer, approached the women.

"Have you business here?" asked one, touching the

leader's elbow as she marched her cohorts up the broad steps of the city hall.

"We have," she answered firmly. "We wish to see the mayor."

The women crowded up into the classic pillared portico, more determined than ever, having got thus far. The policemen now saw that they had an unannounced visitation to deal with.

"You can't go in here like this, in a gang, what's the matter with you?" the spokesman began. "Have you got an appointment with the mayor?"

"That's my business," said the woman more emphatically than diplomatically. "Come, friends!" she called to the women behind her, and again started to enter the building.

The officer became businesslike at once.

"Your friends," he said, with a threatening motion of his club, "can stay where they are! Hey, youse — get back there!" At his signal the other policemen proceeded to force the women backward. They resisted and there was a lively moment or two. Some one telephoned for the "reserves" and in five minutes enough of New York's blue-coated guardians were clanging up in patrol wagons or on the run, with drawn sticks, to disperse an armed mob of rioters.

Reporters from newspaper offices hurried to the scene, with "police cards" stuck in their hatbands. From Broadway poured hundreds of persons, from Park Row and Nassau Street and all the narrow lanes nearby they came, everybody asking everybody what the matter was.

None too gently the policemen drove the massed women down the city hall steps and across the asphalted square in the direction whence they came. The women, shouting and protesting, pushing at the officers and crying out that their children were starving and the "mayor should give us bread," were finally dispersed and subdued. Wherever one spoke sufficient English to be coherent she was surrounded

by a group of eager newspaper men with pads and pencils noting names and expressions of opinion.

Annie, on the fringe of the procession from the start detached herself at the outset of the commotion and stood trembling with excitement watching the hullabaloo. She came in for her share of shoves and pushes as the police kept the crowd in motion, too absorbed in the proceedings to heed. She heard a reporter say that Helena Weitz, the leader of the housewives' horde, had been arrested. She heard the clang of the patrol wagon as it sped away.

After that the women broke up and in pathetic little groups began straggling eastward, talking excitedly to one another, rewrapping their shawls, hunching their babies in position. Plodding back. They had not seen the mayor. They had accomplished nothing.

How fruitless it all was, thought Annie. How stupidly useless! All they got was shoves and abuse, arrest for one of them, laughter and insult for all from a crowd that loved "a scrap," enjoyed their unsuccessful assault upon the executive head of the city, and would view them in future with more contempt and less understanding than ever!

On her way home to her children and her dinner getting, Annie kept saying over and over to herself: "What good does it do, what good does it do? They're right, those women. They ought to have food for their children. But what good comes of upsetting pushcarts and raiding the mayor's office?"

Annie wasn't sure about the mayor. She wondered if he could help if he wanted to. Vaguely she felt he could not, yet that he ought to be able to. The poor, dirty peddlers whose carts had been overturned were not to blame. If they had been, perhaps the mayor could have done something for the women. On the other hand, the women had done wrong. They had made a commotion and they had destroyed property. Yet they were desperate with poverty. What was wrong? They had to do *something*.

What was the right course? There must be *some* right course? . . . Round and round went Annie's thoughts, feeling for a handle somewhere — thinking one moment she was finding a solution; knowing the next she was not.

Bernard came home presently. They had renewed their habit of the welcoming kiss. Since the quarrel and its readjustment, a shy tenderness had sprung up between them. As she left his arms her hand struck against a packet of newspapers in his coat pocket. He rarely bought a paper; never more than one. Here were at least three.

"Say, Ann, I bet you never heard of this paper!" And Bernard, catching her glance of surprise, fished them from his pocket. "I met Rafetzky downstairs and we got to saying something about that soapbox speaker over on Union Square. Rafetzky nearly died of joy when I told him I was interested. He dug up three copies of the paper. He takes it every day, it seems, whether they have anything to eat or not. I been glancing over it, and, say, it's great! Talk about slamming the 'system' — well, this'll surprise you!"

"I know something," said Annie, "that'll surprise *you*! Your lawful wedded wife was in a food riot to-day, and marched down in a procession to call on the mayor at city hall!"

"Wha-a-a-a-a-t!" Bernie followed his mate into the small, smoky kitchen, where she was "dishing up" the boiled cod and potatoes.

"Exactly that," said Annie demurely. "Here, Bern, put the bread and butter on, will you, and tie Dave's bib. Everything's ready. I'll tell you afterward all about the riot and how I didn't meet the mayor."

When the story had been told and Bernie's oh's and no's and by gosh's and you don't mean its had run their course, his face settled into seriousness.

"Nance," he said, gazing out over the vacant lot, past the ugly gashouses, past the untidy backs of tenements

farther south, his eyes narrowed considerably, "Nance, those socialist fellows have the right dope. I'm working for \$624 a year — working as hard as I can at the only job I could get. You are working as hard as you can at your job. And yet we can't get enough out of our labor to keep our three children and ourselves decently fed and clothed, and our rent paid.

" I read in one of these papers that a government authority estimates \$1,350 as the minimum wage necessary to keep a family of five. According to that, we are only *half* living! Over at Rob's school one of the boys that comes to the gym at night tells me some society has picked out twenty-five poor, starved kids and is going to feed 'em up at lunch time every day to prove that it's actual lack of food that keeps them from learning their lessons.

" One out of every five kids in the school is actually *starving*. They fall asleep at their desks. They're so dull they can't learn. They catch every sickness that comes along, and by and by they break down morally as well as physically — and then it's good-night! Then for the reform school, and who's to blame? The men who pay their fathers stingy wages! That soapbox speaker has figures to prove that capital could pay labor exactly twice what it does pay, and still make a fat profit!

" I'm dead sick of the whole thing, Ann! I'd like to go do the same thing as those East Side women who pushed over the carts and trampled the stuff in the gutters. If enough people would rebel and make trouble, something'd be done, I'll bet you! Out of 5,700,000 people in New York city — I read this, too, in the paper — 4,000,000 of them live in tenements like us. If they'd get up and smash things, instead of just standing it, we'd get somewhere. It isn't right."

Bernie got up, thrust his hands into his poverty-lined pockets and began to stride the floor. Watching him thoughtfully, Annie noticed how shabby his clothes were,

how thin his frame. And her heart filled up with pain and tears. She saw again those shawled women with their babies marching down to city hall to "see the mayor."

Poor, frantic, stupid women! Shabbier than Bernie and herself, more miserable even. They had been repulsed with shoves and clubbings from the police and laughter from the crowd. They got nothing. Never would get anything. And neither would Bernie and millions of other young men like him by "smashing things."

Slowly Annie began to see something. Gradually she was finding a "handle" to take hold of. A fantastic simile popped into her mind. Without knowing why, the recollection of an amusement at Coney Island called "the funny stairs" came to her. She had seen these on that night long ago when she went with the factory girls and their "gentlemen friends." How they had screamed over their efforts to climb those jiggling stairs!

By sheer strength they tried to buck the motion. But it was too strong. They fell down, bruising their elbows and knees. And the crowd laughed. They got up and tried again to *force* their way to the top. The jumping staircase only mocked them.

But finally they got the trick. It was perfectly simple after all. You just stepped on, took hold of the rail and *went with the stairs*, adapting your movement to theirs. Then you got to the top, slowly, but without a struggle. These "funny stairs" seemed to represent exactly the social and industrial system of to-day!

"Bern," she began, breaking the little silence, "that is *not* the answer — smashing things. It ought to be. People ought not to be treated as they are, I grant you that. And making a fuss ought to mend matters, I also grant you that. But things are not as they ought to be; they're as they are. And the way to beat them is to *go with them* till you get somewhere. Then, when you have got somewhere, you can do something to help change things."

Bernie turned and looked at his small wife. From the height of his spiritual awakening he gazed down at the woman who "did not understand." He had found his Cause, adopted its platform, been made alive to the course to pursue. He felt just a little pity for Annie, who had not.

"And how," he asked, patiently, "will I 'get somewhere'? How will I help change things — me, a shipping clerk at twelve a week?"

"First of all," answered Annie slowly; she was still thinking it out, still groping in a half-light of understanding, "you must not go on being a shipping clerk at twelve a week. Now wait a second, Bern, I'm not finding fault, I'm suggesting."

"I'm to be president of my tobacco company, I suppose," interjected Bernard. Annie ignored the sarcasm.

"Maybe — some time. It wouldn't be so impossible. But there'd be a lot to do first. You could go to whoever is in charge —"

"Arkright —" put in Bernie, "he's the fellow that hires and fires."

"Very well, Arkright," went on Annie with serene practicality, "go to Mr. Arkright and ask him what to do to get a better job. You had a better job at Simms's. You've got intelligence and experience and — and everything. Find out if there isn't something better in your place that you can do — if there isn't some chance to advance."

Bernie remembered Arkright had said when he engaged him "You can work up." This idea of Annie's "wasn't so rotten" after all. It mightn't come to anything, but there'd be no harm trying it.

The next day Annie met Mrs. Rafetzky in the hallway.

"They've raised milk on us again," was the greeting of the tailor's wife. "Six cents a pint already — loose milk! God knows now what we do!"

"God knows!" echoed Annie. And at the invitation of

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the pale-faced woman, whom mutual miseries and mutual helps had brought affectionately close, she went in "to sit a minute." Morris Rafetzky was a Socialist, and Annie wanted to ask his wife a thing or two about this doctrine that had so enthused her husband.

She did not find Sarah Rafetzky the bubbling fount of knowledge she had expected, however. Whatever enthusiasm she had known for causes, for revolutions, for life itself, had been drained out by suffering. She always had more heart than head. And as heart alone makes a poor weapon to fight battles with, Sarah had gone pretty well down to defeat.

"It's a fine *idea*, all right," Sarah admitted, "but what good does it do me? Morris, he goes to meetings. He gets something out of it, maybe. But me, I'm a woman — (Sarah pronounced it "vooman") what can I do?"

"I know," said Annie sympathetically. "We can't even vote. But this — this Socialism — it's supposed to help people like us some way, isn't it — with labor unions and — and all that?"

Sarah wagged her head, her mouth drawn down at the corners.

"What can you change with it? My husband, he goes out on strike and my children they go without food. It's right. I know the strikes make something once in a while — a little higher wages, a little shorter hours. But we're poor just the same. My boy Nathan, he goes out in the street to find wood to burn and he gets killed!

"My baby she gets sick — and she goes, too. The doctor at the hospital he calls it a long word. But I know what it was. She doesn't get food enough, that was it. And I didn't get food enough before she was born, so how could she be a strong baby! That's how it goes. What's the use?"

As Annie listened, hurt with pity, a little feeling began to flicker about in her mind quite different from the dead

hopelessness of Mrs. Rafetzky. As she went upstairs, thinking of the new rise in milk prices, and of the miseries of her neighbors and herself, she began to see still further into this complicated mass of causes and effects. She began to see there were two ways "the system" could work. It could crush you into soddleness, as it had Sarah Rafetzky. Or it could rouse your fighting spirit, as it was commencing to do in herself.

Perhaps Sarah Rafetzky and her work-driven, anemic husband could not get out of it. They were pushed already to their last limit of strength. But perhaps people like Bernard and she *could* get out of it. Perhaps they could put on a bit more steam, generate more power, achieve one more push—and so climb up—and out—*And help the others!*

The words of Aunt Moggie came back from long ago. "When Bernard gets well," she had said when Bernie was in the hospital, "you must see that he fits himself for something more than mechanical labor. He is bright and self-assured. It can't be done in a minute, but he can do it—and you must help him."

The feeling of wanting to fight it out grew stronger. Once more her father's optimistic spirit spoke, backed by the Irish spirit of unknown ancestors. Once more Annie felt spurred to resist defeat.

## CHAPTER XLI

### BEGINNING THE CLIMB

“LISTEN, Nance; I had a confab with Arkright.” Bernie was a little excited and was trying to keep his fizzing spirits under control as he followed Annie into the kitchen, and back again, and again into the kitchen, and back again, while she set the dinner on the table. “You know, he isn’t a bad sort of guy — if you go at him right.”

“Guess that’s the way with most people,” commented Annie encouragingly.

“Well, anyhow, I got hold of him after lunch, and we talked. I’d been feeling pretty sore at Arkright,” Bernie pursued. “I figured it was rotten of him as manager paying me twelve a week just because I was down. But he was frank. Said it was simply a case of holding his own job — that if he couldn’t show he was running his department at as low expenses as other firms did, he’d get fired. It isn’t his fault; it’s the System’s fault!” Bernard was still hot in the wake of the System. “He said shipping clerks were thicker than flies, and that only an absolutely indispensable man got big pay.

“Now that’s just what I want to get at, I says to him. How can I *be* that man? He kind of looked at me. Of course no one’s actually indispensable, he said, although a good many think they are. But I like a fellow to be ambitious. I can always use a man that knows more than other men about some line of work. Are you willing to knuckle down and get the ins and outs of the business?

“You bet I am, I told him — and he could see I meant it. What ought I to know to get me promotion and more pay?”

"Well, he said, what I need most is a man who knows about freight rates and routings and keeps posted on the changes that are being made all the time now. This war, he said, ought to boost our business to double its regular amount, and maybe more. Everybody'll be buying tobacco for the soldiers, and if this draft law goes through, he says, we'll be working nights and holidays, or I miss my guess.

"The next step after you know all about your clerk job, he said, is to learn the outside end of the business — the selling end. That's the big thing to put over — sales. When you can do that, the way's open to almost any job you want in the company — head manager, vice president, director, owner! Those are the fellows that get all the profits, he said. And he's right, Ann. He doesn't know how right he is."

Bernie paused for the double purpose of starting his dinner, which was now on the table, and trying to recall what he had read in a book Rafetzky had loaned him about how the wealth of the world was distributed.

He could only remember that the authority stated that one per cent. of the people of the United States own fifty-five per cent. of the wealth, and that even in prosperous years more than a tenth of the population was upon the verge of starvation. He considered himself fairly within this hideous classification. And he was thoroughly sick of it.

He longed to be one of the "one per cent." Yet the smattering of knowledge he had so recently acquired as to the pernicious workings of the "System" made him realize that he not only could never be, but that he wouldn't want to be unless he could by the magic power of his necessarily ill-gotten gains reform the world.

Bernie was emotionally and mentally very much mixed up about things. He felt, rather than reasoned out, the rightness of his newly espoused Cause, as all new students of it do. He was stupendously enthused, as all new students of it are. He wanted to do more than merely ac-

knowledge allegiance. He wanted to shout it from the housetops, to change human nature at one stroke, to wither the noxious fruits of the present industrial system instantly, to obliterate poverty, slavery, caste, class hatred, child labor, unemployment and all other corruption at a single blast.

He didn't know where to begin, whom to hate, whom not to blame. He only felt that he had found *something*, the possibilities of which to himself and others he did not dream. It remained for Annie, who knew still less of it than he, to set him upon the practical path leading upward.

"What you want to do first, Bern," she remarked executively, "is to find out about those rates and routings. They have classes in everything on earth at the Y. M. C. A.—I even saw 'Classes for Grocers' on a sign outside their building the other day. And if they haven't what you want, they'll tell you where you can get it.

"Then will come some hard digging, dear—" she went round the table and gave him a little squeeze as she said it. "I know — because I've been through it. You'll have to give up your poor old gym. And pitch into night work and all sorts of weary problems. And it'll be hard, Bern. I know what I'm talking about. Working all day and then working nights is a terrific job. I did it; you can do it! I'll help you. We'll manage it together.

"Oh, Bern, I'll have the nicest dinners for you — ready on clockwork schedule, so's you can shoot right off to the night school all fed up and fat! And I'll get books from the library and read up on this Socialism thing and pop the most important points over to you while you're eating! And before you know it you'll be getting a raise, and then another, and presently Mr. Arkright will jerk you out of that shipping clerk job and make you head of the export department or something. Just one step at a time, Bern, swaying with the System (she was thinking again of the "funny staircase" at Coney Island), and once we're *on top*

we'll shout down — being so much smarter than the others and so much better circumstanced — and tell the rest how to do the same thing."

"Nance" (Annie loved to have him use the old pet name her father had given her), "you're a wonder of a girl."

It was all he said. But the way he said it carried conviction of his earnestness toward the hard new program.

There is no miracle in producing results by hard work. But results do not always seem to be reward. For, if the socialists are right, some 7,000,000 families in these United States, despite eternal toil, are forever toeing the bread-line, and forever will, so long as the "System" lasts.

But there *is* a miracle about hard work. And it lies in the ability of the worker to pull himself up by his own bootstraps — to raise himself by a spurt of energy from hard work to harder work, and to strain at it by dogged will power till the crest of the hill is gained and the blessed downslope stretches ahead.

The miracle is in *being able* to do the heartbreaking stunt. There has got to be the will power, or even the first step cannot be made. There has got to be the physical stamina, or the hanging-on cannot be achieved. There has got to be the opportunity, the fortuitous circumstance, whether of the helpful wife, the helpful employer, the helpful education, or what not.

Mark Twain in "What Is Man?" said all there is to say about the folly of blaming those who fail and praising those who achieve. The "human machine" acts "according to its make" plus the efficiency it gains from outside influence, never from anything it originates within.

Thus Morris Rafetzky couldn't get on. And Bernie Carroll could. Generations of tyranny behind him and an unescapable weight of adversity upon him made of Rafetzky a slave. A heritage of comparative freedom, a husky body,

a helpmate who matched and backed him quality for quality — and Bernie Carroll had three levers that slowly and laboriously pried him from the mass.

Spring melted into summer and Bernard and Annie into their bootstrap task. Heroically they stuck to it through scourges of tenement heat, through weariness and discouragement, through baby sicknesses and family cares. Everything now reeked of war. Stories of the daily carnage were blazoned before an American public too staggered to get the full import. The draft law made its mighty clamor and took its mighty toll. The cost of food and clothes and rent and every necessary thing vaulted to the sky.

Annie never looked at Bernie as he rushed in from work, ate his niggardly meal, splashed his tired face and hands in cold water and tore off to the classes — four a week — at the Y. M. C. A. without feeling him as much a hero as any man who was ready to give his all in soldiership. Bernie never watched Annie in her ceaseless grind and unquenchable cheeriness without blessing her for an angel of help and mercy.

But the war in its onsweep of preparation flung out two wavelets of aid to the Carrolls.

"One of our men is leaving for camp," said Arkright on a certain early autumn day to his assistant shipping clerk. "I'm going to move you up, Carroll. You've done well. I think you can swing Phillips's job on western shipments. Try it a week. If you make out all right the pay'll be fifteen."

Funnily enough, that very day Annie, tentatively answering an advertisement that offered "half-time work to chocolate packers on war boxes," found she could earn four and a half dollars a week in the candy factory three blocks away, working from nine to twelve.

When she heard Bernie's step on the stairs she rushed out

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to tell him her news. He rushed in to tell his, and they collided in a sort of extemporaneous hug.

They blurted the good luck in a single breath.

"Nineteen-fifty!" they chorused. "Nineteen-fifty!" And they did a little dance around the table.

"Bern — how do your toes feel?"

"My toes! What do you mean, my toes?"

"Bernard Carroll—" Annie held up an urging finger, "don't your toes feel as though they were gripping the first rung of the Ladder?"

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE TIDE FLOWS IN

If troubles never come singly, perhaps prosperities do not either. The tide ebbs, and it flows again. It seemed to Annie that from the day she found her short-hour job at the candy factory, she could feel Hope surging slowly toward her like a great wave that starts far out at sea.

It began with the chocolate money. It gathered strength with Bernard's making good in Phillips's job, which he could not have done but for his grueling summer of study; it became joyously visible at the culmination of a certain romance in the Hargan family. And it broke in glistening white beauty upon Annie's shore one day as she walked commonplacely upon the street with her children.

The chocolate money, small as it was, gave the Carrolls a little more life. It relaxed the vicious grip of their poverty. A rich man would have laughed — maybe he would have sighed — to see what Annie did with that four dollars and a half! The wolves she banished, the beauties she bought!

The securing and holding Phillips's job did for Bernard what no "easy money" could ever do. It transformed him from a wage slave to a working *man*. It gave him what none can succeed without — encouragement. It set a light ahead upon which to fix his eyes. It relieved him from the possibility of surrender.

The romance in the Hargan family was such as occasionally happens outside the moving pictures. Janie Hargan married her boss's son. Considering that Janie was very pretty and had worked her way up from the milliner's table to a minor managership, which brought her into fre-

quent contact with young Mr. Royce, of Bloomfield & Royce, Ladies' Sports Hats, Strictly Wholesale, there was no special marvel in it. Perhaps there was, too, on second thought. For Raymond Royce, in this age of commercial considerations and popular prejudice against mothers-in-law, insisted upon Mamma Hargan making the young Royces' shiny, varnish-smelling suburban cottage her home.

It was the very day of the Hargan family's transfer (including Jim-brother, now a husky lad with an electrician's 'prentice job and proudly insistent upon paying his board) from the East Side flat to the purlieus of Long Island City, alluringly called Windsor Gardens, that Annie, too excited to stay indoors dusting new chairs, took the children for a walk on Fourteenth Street.

In Union Square a quarter-size battleship was set up as a naval recruiting station. The kiddies clamored to visit this and, guided by the arm of Chance, Annie turned north at Fifth Avenue, and at Fifteenth Street strolled eastward toward the bald, grit-swept square.

Glancing idly at what used to be the quarters of the Young Women's Christian Association, she noted with surprise above the doorway the words "The People's House" cut into the stone and winking with new gilt.

The People's House. What a good sound that had! Annie repeated it to herself a lot of times as she walked on, tugged by the impatient children. She had been reading considerably about "the people" lately in an effort to absorb the cardinal principles of what Bernie called "securing a social and industrial commonwealth."

The more she read, the more convinced she became that the people — the grand masses of them — in her prosperous "land of the free" had a pretty bad time of it. Certainly the people of the tenements, the people she had known for the thirty years of her life, had no "house." All of the time they had no luxuries, much of the time no pleasures, some of the time not even the barest necessities. The peo-

ple who had clubhouses and like enjoyments lived uptown by the park, or on Riverside Drive. If "the people" had a "house" in her neighborhood, Annie wanted to know about it.

The following afternoon when her chocolate packing was finished and her housework done for the day, she walked over for a better look.

It was a large, fine building, as handsome as the apartments Annie enjoyed looking at when she and Bernie in their first married year "lived uptown." Outside were a number of signs announcing classes, lectures, concerts, the day's menu in the coöperative restaurant. There was a welcoming look about the place. Annie crossed the street and found herself looking into the "house" bookstore. A few more steps and she was in the entrance hall.

Notices and posters were on the walls, describing courses for every sort of work and chances for many sorts of play. The doors of the bookstore were invitingly open, likewise those of an office on the opposite side. Straight ahead was an auditorium where something was going on. In fact, a great deal seemed to be going on everywhere.

Men and women, girls and boys, moved about, in and out of doors, up and down by stairs and elevator, or stood in groups chatting. Some looked poor and work-worn, others brisk and prosperous; but there was something about them that made Annie feel comradely toward all. The house itself seemed silently to offer her a place in it. As she stood, looking and absorbing, she felt a sudden warm grasp upon her arm.

"Well, what do you think of that! If it ain't—it is Annie Carroll!"

And there beside her was the "Firebrand" girl, her dark face glowing with friendliness, her eyes alight.

"Nena Rabinovitch!"

"Sure!" said Nena genially. "And *always* Nena Rabinovitch! I'm married to this house. These classes and

concerts are my children. Oh, Annie, I'm so proud of them; I want to tell you how wonderful they are and how they thrive! But you — your people — are they well? — it's centuries, Ann, since I saw you. How did you come here? Where do you live? Come on upstairs to my office. I've got to talk to you."

Not waiting or expecting answers, Nena pulled her guest along upstairs to a cubbyhole of a place with a desk and chair and telephone, and there they sat and poured out the story of the years.

"Bern," said Annie that night as they sat in that interval of homely comfort and leisure that followed supper on Saturday nights when the classes were closed, "Bern, light your smelliest pipe, put your elbows on the table like me, look me in the eyes, and tell me exactly what you see as our future."

Being a fairly typical American husband, Bernard obeyed his wife, puffed a few times reflectively and said:

"Well — if I had my choice, I'd get hold of a million or so and spend it educating the community to put the prosperity and happiness of all the people, and not just a few, as the very first and foremost consideration. I'd see that no one, through wealth, had other people at his mercy.

"I'd see that the community itself controlled everything that gives people work, food, shelter, clothes, education, love and recreation. I'd have all the banks and railroads and coal mines and factories and slaughterhouses and every necessary industry owned by the people and for them. I'd see that every child had a chance. And every rotten tenement like this was wiped out and decent clean homes put in its place. I'd —"

"Listen, my liege lord," interrupted Annie cruelly, "you'll never have a million dollars! You'll never reform the world at a fell swoop. But I get your meaning, most beloved enthusiast. I asked you what you see as *our* future.

And now, just to prove how womanly I am, I'll answer the question myself. We're going to work in, at, with and through the People's House."

Bernie stared.

"The Peop—" he began.

"—le's House, my dear, exactly," supplied Annie. "And I'm gratified to see you are less enlightened than I. A stone's throw from here is a place," she pursued glibly, "that patters with footsteps and echoes with voices all day, every day, and well into the night — people of every language, sort and condition, but all with the same cause, *your* Cause (I pronounce it with a capital letter) in their hearts and busy brains.

"They study there — English, science, arts, trades — they play and laugh and talk and do stunts in the gym. It is a people's world within a world of masters.

"I met Nena Rabinovitch there. She's a part of it. She has classes in all sorts of things, and organizes strikes on the side whenever she stumbles across some factory where they work the workers down to the brute line. She told me how the house was a fulfilled dream to her people. How they conceived it, took the first timid steps toward getting it, how they scraped and saved and gave. How they denied themselves even the few hours' leisure they have to get the plans under way, holding meetings, organizing committees, tearing from their shops and benches and offices to take part in the 'great adventure' of making a body for their souls. That's how Nena put it. That, she said, was what a home really should be.

"It's a wonderful place, Bern. There's a school in it, and a library and a gym and a theater and everything. There's room for us. They'll welcome us. We'll find our niche there.

"And by and by, dear, when the burden of making a living has lightened a little — remember, milord, you're to be president of your tobacco company — we shall have time

to think, and to rouse others to think, and to live, and to show Morris and Sarah Rafetzky and about 3,999,998 more like them how to climb up the stairs.

" You know, I've had a sneaking idea for months that when you were very, very, very rich, so that you were almost disgusting, we'd start a settlement house of our own, only much nicer than the one I went to when I was a poor, skimpy factory girl.

" But now I've changed our minds. We won't do that. We'll add our weight to something already well and wisely started. We'll work and study, and when we've learned more, and the Cause has soaked in good and deep, and we've learned how to do soapbox speeches and things, we'll make the freeing of human beings our work, Bern.

" And maybe some day I'll have a vote, and you and I and Sarah and Morris Rafetzky, and all the children that are old enough to vote, will troop off together and cast our proud and powerful ballots for men who will help toward the coöperative commonwealth and brotherhood of democracy. And you can run for office, Bern! And be an alderman or something that won't take us away from New York. Are you with me, Bernie? Or do I sound too much like a soapbox orator?"

Bernard's answer was wordless. He rather liked soapbox orators.

A short time after this, on the 7th of November, 1917, to be exact, at 7:30 in the morning, Morris Rafetzky pounded on the Carrolls' door and poked his newspaper wildly at Bernie.

" Look at it!" he cried, his thin face flushed with excitement, his hair all wild, " the women have the vote — the women have the vote! And the Party polled — my God, look at the figures here for New York, almost a hundred thousand, including —"

He broke off because Annie had seized his paper and

was staring at the headlines concerning the suffrage vote.

"I don't *believe* it!" she kept saying over and over until Bernie grabbed for his turn at the paper, and they all talked and laughed and looked and tramped up and down and jumped the kids about and looked some more and talked and shook hands and couldn't believe it, but did, anyhow — and rejoiced.

All that day the feeling kept growing in Annie's heart that she had found herself, that she had now both the knowledge of what she wanted to do, and the power to do it. And perhaps that is the best feeling of which the human heart is capable.

As in all great joys, she thought of her father and his inextinguishable hope and belief in the ultimate good. Through happy tears she looked out over the dreary vacant lot, dreary now no longer, for its very cans and cartwheels bleaching in the sun seemed only to picturize the débris of her old doubts and fears that were going to be cleaned away and the space built upon, just as some day that lot would be built upon. Maybe clean, wholesome homes for workers would be there, with plots for children to play in, kept pure with air and sunshine!

Now at least she had in her hand the weapon to help win it. And in her brain the consciousness that should awaken the Sarah Rafetzkys and all her drudging sisterhood.

Life had been sad. But now it was good. Her father's words came back. "Keep your own promises, Nance, then at least you can expect promises to be kept to you!"

Life was keeping its promise after all.

Bernie never was president of his tobacco company. But he never wanted to be. He got well to the point where "the burden of making a living was lightened," and there was time for love and play and companionship with his

mate and his children and "Aunt Moggie," who had the sunniest room in their decent little flat.

Some one has said that the success element in marriage is having a mutual interest *outside* of marriage. The Carrolls had. And it was focused in the "House."

*"The pillars of it go up like the brawny trunks of heroes. The sweet human flesh of men and women is molded about its bulwarks, strong, impregnable. The faces of little children laugh out from every cornerstone. The spans and arches of it are the joined hands of comrades, and up in the heights and spaces are inscribed the numberless musings of the dreamers of the world. Sometimes the work goes forward in deep darkness; sometimes in blinding light; now beneath the burden of unutterable anguish; now to the tune of great laughter and heroic shoutings. Sometimes in the silence of the night one may hear the tiny hammerings of the comrades at work up in the dome — the comrades that have climbed ahead."*— (Charles Rann Kennedy, "The Servant in the House.")

THE END

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